

THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

CONCERNING THE
COMING OF CHRIST

UNFOLDED
Upon Principles which are allowed to be common to the Jews,
BOTH IN
ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES:

IN ANSWER TO THE
Objections of Mr. GIBBON and Dr. EDWARDS upon this Subject.

TO WHICH IS ADDED
AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING
Some REMARKS upon the MIRACLES of the GOSPEL,
IN REPLY

To an Objection of the latter of these Writers.

PART I.

By *N. NISBETT, M. A.*

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SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

COMING OF CHRIST



P R E F A C E.

TO THE READER.

IT has been observed that Christianity, by being communicated to mankind in the historic form, possesses some advantages which perhaps could not so well be attained in any other way. It is founded upon facts, and it is the proper province of history to record those facts, which the Gospel historians have related with a distinguished and unexampled simplicity: and where simplicity of narration prevails, the presumption is, that perspicuity must accompany it. Indeed, they seem to be so nearly allied, as to be almost, if not altogether, inseparable.

It may perhaps seem strange to assert, that the various and discordant opinions of different sects of Christians, concerning the true meaning of the sacred Writers, is no proof that they are deficient in perspicuity; but the truth is, they have not had justice done them. They have written an history, which every man distinguishes by the appellation of *the Gospel History*, and which they evidently intended should be considered *as an History*. This natural and obvious mode of studying the Holy Scriptures, has been too much overlooked, and, upon the subject of the ensuing pages, has, in no one instance that has fallen within the sphere of the Author's knowledge, been sufficiently attended to. Hence the difficulties with which the minds of men have hitherto been perplexed in ascertaining the true meaning of our Lord, or of his historians: hence the objections which the adversaries of Christianity have raised against it.

The

P R E F A C E.

The enquiry which is here presented to the reader, with a view to obviate these difficulties, and to answer these objections, has been conducted with a close attention to the sacred Writers as *Historians*. If it has been successful, the merit is due to them for their accuracy and perspicuity---not to the sagacity of the Author. To himself the enquiry has been attended with the greatest satisfaction---and he now waits, with a becoming deference, the sentence of his judges. If he has taken up the subject in a proper light, he has no doubt (though he may have failed in some instances, in the execution) that the Scripture doctrine, concerning the coming of Christ, will, ere long, be viewed as one of the brightest internal evidences of the truth of Christianity, and the true key to a more accurate knowledge of the sacred writings. If he is wrong, he trusts he shall ever be open to conviction, and ready to acknowledge that he is mistaken.

ASH, March 31, 1792.



E R R A T A.

- p. 10. line 19. for *primive* read *primitive*.
- p. 36. line 13. for *are* read *is*.
- p. 36. directing line, for *favourest* read *thus*.
- p. 48. line 8. for *inte* read *into*.

The Scripture Doctrine of the Coming of
CHRIST, &c.

WHEN Christianity was first made known to the world, its divine Author delivered his doctrines, and exhibited the proofs of his mission, with unaffected simplicity. Satisfied of the intrinsic excellence of the one, and of the clearness and evidence of the other, he left them to produce their own effects upon the minds of his hearers, without attempting to illustrate that excellence, or to shew that those proofs were proper and conclusive. A very intelligent and ingenious writer has very properly termed this, *our Lord's original manner*, from which it does not appear that he ever deviated, but when opposition made it necessary.* When, however, objections were formed against his religion, he did not think it beneath the dignity of his character to engage in its defence, and to

* See Gerard's Dissertations.

employ the powers of reasoning, to expose the weakness of those objections, and the unreasonableness of an opposition to him. Nor did he, in any one instance, express any displeasure at an inquisitive turn of mind, when under the direction of a regard to truth. It was only when an insidious and captious spirit were marked in their behaviour, too strongly to be mistaken by any one, that such a conduct fell under his reprehension. So far was our Lord from requiring an implicit faith in his followers, that he directed them to search the scriptures, and to examine for themselves whether, or not, his doctrines were founded in truth.

The same liberality of mind evidently actuated the great Apostle of the Gentiles, when he directed his converts to give a reason of the hope that was in them, and in the spirit of meekness to instruct those who opposed the Christian faith.

As a candid statement of any objections to Christianity, manifestly was not offensive to our Saviour himself, or to his more immediate disciples—it ought not to be dis-

displeasing to any of its friends who come after them, from whatever quarter it may arise. Even they whose profession leads them to consider Christianity in every possible point of view in which it may be placed, may, I conceive, without violating the duties of that profession, sometimes think it proper to communicate their difficulties to the public, with a view to a more accurate investigation.

Had unbelievers confined their attacks upon Christianity, within these just and reasonable limits, the example of its great Author, and that of his Apostles, would not only have justified its friends, in treating their conscientious scruples, with all possible deference and respect, but would have laid them under an obligation of endeavouring to solve their difficulties (for difficulties there are in all sciences) with all possible accuracy. But the smallest acquaintance with the Deistical Writers will shew, that they too often have had other objects in view than the satisfying of conscientious scruples. Under the mask of friendship for the cause, they have frequently shewn their disposition to undermine and to destroy it; and they have

demanded concessions, which they well knew, if granted, would effectually ruin its credit, with the discerning part of mankind.

There is no writer of this, or perhaps of any age, who stands more distinguished for this line of conduct than Mr. Gibbon, the celebrated Author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. His great abilities—his extensive knowledge—and his elegant pen, eminently qualified him for becoming the champion of Infidelity. And if he really believed Christianity to be an imposture—his taking a decided part against it, would, in my opinion, have been perfectly justifiable and manly—nay, a duty which he owed to truth and to the world. But to shelter himself under a profession of Christianity, and at the same time to do all in his power to convict it of falshood and imposture, is, to say the least, a conduct which is utterly unworthy of the grave historian, or the ingenuous searcher after truth.*

I wish

* Mr. Gibbon, under the mask of pretended reverence for Religion, exposes its seeming imperfections. The comparison
therefore

I wish I could, consistently with a regard to truth, exempt from this censure, the learned Dr. Thomas Edwards, author of a series of Sermons lately preached before the University of Cambridge. His plan of pointing out to the deliberate attention of the learned and judicious such important articles as appeared to him to require a more accurate discussion than they have hitherto obtained, could not, if executed with impartiality, but have met with the approbation of the serious and rational Christian, as well as of that of the sober

therefore which Voltaire's adversary (the Author of Letters to the Jews) draws between him and Shaftsbury, admirably suits our Historian.

Shaftsbury, if we may believe some of his learned countrymen, was an enemy of Revelation, and the more dangerous, because in his attacks, he seems to profess respect. He never attacks it face to face, or with serious arguments, but with raillery and ironical reflections, which look as if they fell by chance. He continually protests that he firmly believes all the facts and doctrines which are discovered by Revelation. He is convinced, that our Religion is divine, and our sacred writings inspired; that every understanding should bow down to them; and that none but libertines and profane men could absolutely deny or dispute the authority of a line or a syllable in these holy books. See Mr. Davis's reply to Mr. Gibbon's Vindication, page 165, from whence this is taken.

Infidel. A judicious statement of the points in debate between the historian of the Roman Empire, and his antagonists, and an accurate discrimination of the defects of the advocates for the Christian cause, could not but have been of essential service in promoting its best interests. But was it necessary, it may be asked, to the execution of this plan, to involve the advocates of Christianity in one general and indiscriminate censure—to degrade them and their cause as low as possible, and to represent the historian of the Roman Empire, as insulting and triumphing over his vanquished enemies? * Was it consistent with the fairness and impartiality of a sincere enquirer after truth, to assert, that we ought not to entertain any sanguine hopes of success in obviating one of the principal objections of the historian of the Roman empire, even though it had been true (which however I apprehend is far from being the case) that a Jortin had failed of success in discussing a subject of theological or polite learning? † Was it becoming the character of the grave divine

* See Dr. Edwards's first Sermon, p. 4.

* Ibid. p. 10.

to acquiesce in the solution of a difficulty, which he himself acknowledges may be treated with profane derision by the licentious scoffer, or opposed with argument by the sturdy polemic, while he adds, with a sneer that cannot be misunderstood, that it will be devoutly admitted by every pious Christian, as proceeding from the authority of an inspired apostle and the beloved disciple of Jesus? * In a word;—could the learned preacher possibly be ignorant, when he submitted it to the antagonist of the historian of the Roman Empire, most earnestly to consider whether the real interests of Christianity would not be more essentially promoted by conceding the objection to his adversary, relative to the coming of Christ, than by vainly attempting to remove it—that by such a concession its essential interests would be totally abandoned? †

It cannot be surprising to any one, that a writer who so fully and unequivocally unfolds his sentiments of Christianity, should describe its advocates, as discover-

* See Dr. Edwards's 1st sermon, p. p. 10 and 11.

† Dr. Edwards's 2d sermon, p. 35.

ing but slender traces of profound and exquisite erudition—of solid criticism and accurate investigation, and as frequently disgusting us by vague and inconclusive reasoning—by unseasonable banter and senseless witticisms—by unlettered bigotry and enthusiastic jargon—by futile cavils and illiberal invectives ;* while he keeps wholly out of sight—the unfair and mutilated quotations—the glaring misrepresentations and the equally illiberal invectives that have, with so much justice, been laid to the charge of the historian of the Roman Empire by a Davis—a Chelfum and a Whitaker ! But whatever may have been the defects of the advocates of Christianity—a writer who will descend to such detestable arts, certainly deserves neither the praise of a faithful historian, nor the pompous title of a triumphant Champion of Infidelity, so ostentatiously bestowed on him by our learned University Preacher.†

But however improper and unbecoming the conduct of the adversaries of Christianity, in their manner of attacking it, may have been,—still it is incumbent upon its advocates, if they would

* See Dr. Edwards's 1st sermon, p. 4.

† Ibid.

evince themselves to be its genuine friends, to give the closest attention to their objections, when they appear to have any real weight. I mean not, by this observation, to insinuate a want of zeal in the friends of Christianity, in opposing the supporters of Infidelity. The numerous and able defences of our holy Religion, which adorn the English language, are unparalleled in any other country. But in so extensive a field of controversy, it will not be surprising that some topics have been less perfectly considered, than they appear to have deserved. A watchful adversary, we may be assured, will not fail to point them out; and as the cause of Christianity owes much of its present lustre to the objections of former writers on the side of Infidelity—so I doubt not, by the same means, it will still continue to gain additional credit in the eyes of the discerning and impartial part of mankind. From a long attention to its evidences, I am convinced that it only wants to be fairly represented and accurately understood, to prove that its origin is from the God of truth.

Among other subjects which the learned University Preacher has singled out for discussion

cussion—the Scripture doctrine concerning *the coming of Christ* has, I think, very properly been brought forward to the public attention. It has on all hands been allowed to be a subject of great difficulty, and if a judgment of its importance may be formed from the insinuations of its adversaries, or from the manner in which it has been understood by the most able divines, no subject ever claimed a more attentive consideration! The essential interests of Christianity are involved in the enquiry.

The objection of the historian of the Roman Empire upon this subject, when enumerating what he calls the secondary causes of the rapid progress of Christianity, is thus stated.

“ In the primitive church, the influence
 “ of truth was very powerfully strength-
 “ ened by an opinion, which however
 “ it may deserve respect for its use-
 “ fulness and antiquity, has not been
 “ found agreeable to experience. It was
 “ universally believed that the end of the
 “ world and the kingdom of heaven were
 “ at hand. The near approach of this
 “ wonderful event had been predicted by
 “ the

“ the apostles; the tradition of it was
 “ preserved by their earliest disciples, and
 “ those who understood in their literal
 “ sense, the discourses of Christ himself,
 “ were obliged to expect the second and
 “ glorious coming of the Son of Man in
 “ the clouds, before that generation was
 “ totally extinguished, which had beheld
 “ his humble condition upon earth. Yet,
 “ adds he, the revolution of seventeen cen-
 “ turies has instructed us not to press too
 “ closely the mysterious language of pro-
 “ phecy and revelation.”*

Our learned University Preacher, tread-
 ing in the steps of the historian of the
 Roman Empire, mentions our Lord as
 expressly foretelling, that the generation
 then existing should not be totally extin-
 guished, till it had witnessed his second
 and glorious appearance in the clouds of
 heaven—“ Yet, *says he*, the records of his-
 “ tory do not authorize us to believe that
 “ this prediction was accomplished at the
 “ destruction of Jerusalem.”† And, after
 a professed examination of the various

* See Gibbon's History, Vol. II. pp. 300—1. Oñ. Edit.

† Edwards's 2d sermon, pp. 19 and 20.

passages which relate to this subject, he concludes his enquiry with saying that—
 “ it becomes the antagonist of our historian most earnestly to consider, whether
 “ the real interests of Christianity, would
 “ not be more essentially promoted by
 “ conceding the objection to his adversary, than by vainly attempting to remove it.” *

The sentiments of divines who have more or less given countenance to the objection of the historian of the Roman Empire, he thus enumerates—“ It may not be thought wonderful that Baronius and other Romanists, to avoid the application of the
 “ *Man of Sin*, should earnestly contend
 “ that the speedy appearance of Christ was
 “ expected by the Apostles: (See Mede’s
 “ works, p. 665.) but it is somewhat remarkable that the Orthodox father of
 “ the celebrated Prelate who translated
 “ Isaiah, in a treatise designed to confute
 “ a supposed latitudinarian, should assent
 “ to the validity of our historian’s objection, by confessing, without reserve,
 “ that the Apostles were mistaken. (See
 “ Lowth’s Vindication, &c. page 52.)—

* Edwards’s second sermon, p. 35.

“ Grotius

“ Grotius insinuates, that for wise pur-
 “ poses the pious deception was permitted
 “ to take place : (Gibbon, vol. II. p. 301.
 “ See Grotius de Veritate, lib. ii. § 6. Cle-
 “ ric. ad 1 Theff. v. 10.) and an ingenious
 “ Professor of our own University does
 “ not appear extremely solicitous to relieve
 “ the Apostles from the accusation of er-
 “ ror. (See Dr. Watson’s Apology, p. 62.”)

It would be easy to enlarge this cata-
 logue by a long enumeration of names—
 of a Sykes, the Taylor’s, a Benson, and a
 Macknight, &c. but it may suffice to say,
 in general, that though they may not have
 been so explicit as a Grotius and a Lowth
 —yet all of them, without exception, have
 manifestly discovered their embarrassment,
 and the difficulties which they laboured
 under, in considering the subject. In a
 word, I do not know of a single writer
 who appears to have considered it with
 that attention that it deserves.

It may be deemed a bold undertaking to
 attempt a removal of difficulties, which
 have hitherto baffled all the skill, and all
 the abilities and learning of the greatest di-
 vines

vines that the Christian world has to boast of ; and it may, by some, be imputed to an unbecoming vanity to pretend to see farther than men whose talents were far superior to any that I can pretend to. But the fact is, I have not entered upon this work presumptuously, but was, in some degree, distinguished by Dr. Edwards himself, as having given an interpretation of the 24th of Matthew, and its parallel chapters, which was attended with fewer difficulties than the common hypothesis. At the same time, the learned Preacher, condescended to mention some objections to my interpretation, and, in a manner, called upon me to reconsider the subject.* With respect to learning, I do not, in this instance, conceive that it is particularly necessary.† All that appears to me to be requisite to the discussion of this subject, is, a due attention to the state and circumstances of things among the Jews, in the time of our Saviour, and to the language which he avowedly adopted. The judicious reader must judge how far I have succeeded. I might perhaps add, as a suf-

* See Edwards's 2d sermon, pp. 23-4.

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ficient apology, that when Christianity is attacked, and accused of imposture, every man, who has a value for its interests, has a right to cast in his mite to the offerings of God, and to withhold that mite, when he has it in his power to give it, implies some degree of criminality !

But before I enter upon a critical discussion of this subject—it may not be displeasing to some of my readers, to present them with some presumptive arguments, that the objections of unbelievers are not founded in truth, and that our Saviour prophesied of an event, which really took place.

The first presumptive evidence that I shall offer to his consideration is, that this prophecy was not accidentally drawn from him, but was repeatedly and deliberately made, upon various occasions, throughout his whole ministry, and he plainly asserted its accomplishment, in terms as strong as language would admit.—*Verily, I say unto you—ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come. Verily, I say unto you—there be some standing here who shall*

shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things (one of which was, his coming in his kingdom) be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. What could have tempted our Lord to have expressed himself so strongly, and to have brought this prophecy so fully into view, but the firm assurance that it would be completed? But this reminds us of a second presumptive evidence, that the prophecy in question was, in some sense or other, fulfilled.

It will, I believe, be allowed by the most strenuous advocates of Infidelity, that the Author of our Religion possessed a large share of judgment and penetration; and the history of his life, as delineated by his historians, demonstrates that his prudence and caution were, at least, equal to his ability.

In that vast variety of circumstances in which he is exhibited to our view, many of which no human sagacity could have foreseen, we cannot discern a single deviation

ation from the strict line of prudence and discretion. To the innocence of the dove, he constantly joined the wisdom of the serpent. All the machinations of his enemies (many of which were certainly well designed for the purpose for which they were intended) were foiled by the wonderful and unpremeditated answers, which their questions to him produced. The history of the most enlightened ages and of the most celebrated philosophers can produce nothing comparable, in this respect, to that of our Saviour. The instances of the woman taken in adultery, and that of the tribute money, not to mention any others, are fine specimens of the wisdom which directed his conduct.

But if our Lord really prophesied of an event which was to happen, in his own age, and at a particular given period of that age, which did not happen, and which, in that case, he must have known would not happen—where was the wisdom of such a declaration? It required but little penetration to have foreseen that the failure of the accomplishment of such a prediction, would have effectually blasted all his ex-

C pectations

pectations of becoming the founder of a Religion which, in due time, was to spread over the whole earth, and fold within its embraces the whole human race. A wise man therefore, one should naturally have imagined, would either have declined the character of a Prophet altogether—or he would have predicted an event which was not to have happened, but at a very distant and remote period. Had our Saviour contented himself with predicting his coming at the end of the world—or at an indefinite period—his wisdom would have remained unimpeached, even on the supposition of his being an Impostor—for by his prediction of so remote an event, he would probably have attained all the purposes which he could have wished. But nothing less than a consciousness of his being a prophet of God, and that he spoke the words of God, could have justified a wise man in declaring, in such confident and decisive terms, that he should come, while some who were then with him were still living—for the detection of the imposture (if there was one) must have been inevitable, and the consequences fatal to the progress of his cause.

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A third presumptive evidence of the truth of our Saviour's prophecy, may be drawn from the consideration of his moral character. The first qualification which he announced as necessary to admission into his kingdom, was repentance; or a change of mind, from vice to virtue—*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And it was one of the professed objects of his ministry (I might have said the chief) to correct and purify the vitiated morality which was then too prevalent among his countrymen. He extended it, not to the external conduct only, but to the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nor was he barely a teacher of morality, but an exemplary pattern of every virtue that can adorn human nature. Even the enemies of Christianity, have done justice to the excellence of our Saviour's moral character. He therefore who could have said, and whose whole conduct was in perfect unison with the declaration, that it was his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly father, could not (one should suppose) have imposed a falsehood upon his disciples, under the character of a prophecy, which, in a short space of time, was to determine whether he

was a true prophet or not. Such a conduct is not only too shocking to be entertained, but is utterly incompatible with that uniform detestation of vice, of every kind, which he so strongly manifested.

If it be said, that in order to gain his purpose of drawing mankind to embrace his religion, he only assumed *the garb* of virtue, I allow that the successful impostor must observe some caution, and lay some restraint upon his conduct, to induce the world to believe in him—but it is scarcely possible for an impostor *always* to be upon his guard. Some indiscreet moments *will* occur, when he will appear in his true character, and the thin disguise will be removed. But in all that prodigious variety of circumstances and situations, in which our Saviour appeared, to the keen and penetrating eyes of the most inveterate enemies that ever man had to encounter, he preserved an uniformity of virtue that is altogether unexampled in the history of humanity.

Another presumptive evidence of the truth of the prophecy in question is, its close connection with another, which was
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of a nature, at least equally remarkable, and at that time, equally improbable.— This was, no less than the total overthrow of a state that had subsisted for ages, and at a period when the whole Jewish nation, instead of forming any expectation of so dreadful a catastrophe, were entertaining the most sanguine hopes, under the auspices of their Messiah, of gaining the empire of the world! Of the accomplishment of this event, the records of history give us the fullest evidence that can be desired; which is surely a strong presumptive proof that, in some sense or other, the prediction of his coming, likewise had its completion.

Again if we consider the character and conduct of the Apostles—we shall be furnished with still farther presumptive evidence of the truth of our Lord's prophecy. They, it is plain, cherished the idea of their Master's coming, long after his death, even to the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem; and that with the utmost ardour of expectation. They perpetually reminded the Christians of their own time of the impending event, and in such terms as necessarily led them to believe, that it

was very near at hand. It is indeed said by Mr. Gibbon, (as has before been observed) " that the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the language of prophecy and revelation ;"—and by Dr. Edwards, " that the records of history do not authorize us to believe this prediction was accomplished at the destruction of Jerusalem." But if these insinuations are true, by what rules of probability can the silence of the Apostles be accounted for? Were there none to be found among them, or their numerous followers, honest enough to acknowledge they had been deceived? None who, in the midst of the severest persecutions, availed themselves of this fair and honourable opportunity of deserting a cause, which exposed them to such cruel hardships? It was not thus, when Jesus was crucified. The language of some then was—*we trusted that it had been he, who should have redeemed Israel.* Their hopes that he was the Messiah were just expiring: *Besides all this, said they, this is the third day—the day on which he promised to rise again.* How extremely natural were these doubts and apprehensions? How perfectly agreeable to what must have been the state of their minds

minds at such a crisis? But now, it seems that not a voice was heard to own the truth, nor a complaint made, that the word of prophecy had not been completed! On the contrary—those of the Apostles and their companions who survived the destruction of their country continued with the greatest firmness to preach the religion of Jesus; to suffer for his name, and earnestly to exhort their converts to invincible steadfastness in the faith which was once delivered to the Saints!—When the numbers that, at that period, had embraced Christianity, are considered, we may safely challenge those who are best versed in the history of imposture, to produce a single instance like this!

The presumptive evidences of the truth of this prophecy, might be enlarged, almost without end—but there is one more which is so strong, that I should be inexcusable to pass it by, though I mean to do little more than to mention it.

If the friends of Christianity could have so far forgotten what was due to truth and to their own characters—if a sense of shame, for having been deceived—or any other principle which can possibly be supposed (in such circumstances) to operate upon the human mind, could have im-

fed silence upon them—yet it would still remain to be accounted for, how silence could have been imposed upon *the enemies of Christianity*! If the prophecy was not accomplished—what a glorious opportunity was this, to display their just enmity to the Christian cause?—an opportunity, which it is, almost, I might say, altogether impossible to suppose (the invincible hatred of the unbelieving Jews being considered) they should not have availed themselves of—an opportunity, which could not but have proved (circumstanced as Christianity then was) fatal to its progress. Yet, wonderful to tell, here was, according to the representation of unbelievers, a prophecy unaccomplished, though expressly limited to a determined period for its completion—yet Christianity gained ground—it surmounted obstacles which no other religion ever had to encounter—it triumphed over Paganism, and, at length, gained a complete establishment throughout the whole Roman Empire. And what is still more extraordinary—Ancient Ecclesiastical History gives no room to think that the charge was ever made against the truth of our religion, though we know, there were not wanting men of sufficient ability
and

and inclination to have made the most of such a circumstance! It was reserved for modern times to make the important discovery!

But we readily acknowledge that these are only presumptive evidences (though we think very strong ones) that this discovery has no foundation in fact—yet we rest not the merits of our cause on presumptive evidence only.—We now hope to prove, to the entire satisfaction of every dispassionate and impartial enquirer, that our Saviour has left us criteria, sufficient to determine the true meaning of the prophecy in question—sufficient to vindicate his own character, and that of his Apostles—sufficient, we trust, to evince that his prophecy was, not figuratively and metaphorically, but fairly and literally accomplished. If the records of history do not corroborate the scripture account, we are ready to give up the point to our adversaries. To the scriptures then we appeal for the decision of this important question!

If we turn our attention to the time when the approach of our Lord's advent was announced,

announced, we shall find that John the Baptist, as his fore-runner, declared that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*: and when he himself began publicly to preach the glad tidings of the Gospel, he addressed the people in precisely the same terms—*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. It was likewise a language that his Apostles, by his direction, constantly made use of. Say to them—*the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you*. Their public instructions too are stiled—*preaching the kingdom of God, and preaching the Gospel*—that is—*the good news of the kingdom*. And it is particularly to be remarked, that as this was our Lord's original language, so he continued to make use of it, to the very close of his life. A striking instance of this, we have in Luke xxi. 31. where he had, but a few days before his death, been speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem. *When ye see these things come to pass know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand*.

All these expressions are evidently borrowed from the language of ancient prophecy, and particularly from that of the Prophet Daniel, ch. ii. 44. *In the days of these*

these Kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people: It shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

The language of our Saviour, taken from this source, seems to have been so well understood by the whole nation of the Jews, that, as Dr. Sykes has well observed, we do not find a single instance of their asking what was his meaning.* They all knew perfectly well, that, by these expressions, it was meant to be understood, that the Messiah's reign was about to commence: And no tidings could have been so grateful to their ears, as the intimations of its approach; for they exactly coincided with the general expectation, that about that time the Messiah was to appear among them.

It is, I presume, a fact that needs no proof, to any of my readers, that the Jews, in our Saviour's time, looked for a person, under the character of their Messiah, who should be a temporal Prince, to conduct them to conquest and to empire; and there is sufficient evidence, in the Gospel

* See Sykes on the Christian Religion. Ch. III. pp. 29—30.
history,

history, that our Lord's own disciples, held precisely the same sentiments upon the subject, with the rest of their countrymen.— These being the acknowledged sentiments of the Jewish nation, it was necessary for our Lord to act with great prudence and caution, and to be very sparing of his declarations that he himself was their Messiah, lest the too great eagerness of the people should frustrate the grand object of his mission. And if we examine the Gospel history with attention, we shall not find that he was very forward to declare himself, under that character, even to his own disciples. It was highly to the credit of our Lord's character, that he, in general, left this to be inferred from the excellence of the doctrines which he taught, and from the many wonderful works which he performed. This mode of procedure, though it probably did not answer their present sanguine expectations, had a strong tendency to rivet their affections to him, and to increase their reverence for his character. He knew what was in man, and of course, was well aware that deep-rooted prejudices were not to be destroyed, but by gradual and gentle means. It was particularly
neces-

necessary that he should consult those prejudices, and sympathize with their weakness ; for, in the course of his ministry, he had various events to unfold to them, in which both he and they would be deeply interested, that were totally incompatible with their ideas of the nature of the Messiah's character.

It is, if I mistake not, to the unfolding of these events that the attentive reader of the Gospel history, must look, in order to get an exact information of the precise meaning of our Lord, in most, if not all the passages which speak of the coming of Christ, and which have been the occasion of so much perplexity, and of the objections which, in the preceding pages, we have seen have been urged against Christianity. And that we may obtain the most perfect satisfaction that the subject will admit of, we shall consider, distinctly, every material passage, in its connection, and point out the force of the reasoning which that connection affords.

We meet with nothing upon this subject, that seems particularly to command
our

our attention till we come to the 10th chapter of St. Matthew; the preceding chapters being taken up with an account of the miraculous birth of our Saviour—the preaching of John the Baptist—the temptation in the Wilderness—the sermon on the Mount—and the relation of a variety of miracles which our Lord had performed. The tenth chapter opens with a commission to the twelve Apostles to work miracles in his name, and to confine their labours to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Upon this occasion he gave them their directions as to the nature of their instructions. v. 7. *As ye go—preach, saying—the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*

The commission to preach such tidings to their countrymen, who were ardently expecting the approach of the kingdom of Heaven—or, which is the same thing—the coming of their Messiah, could not but have been received by them with great pleasure; and they, no doubt, entertained the most sanguine hopes of success in the execution of their embassy. But the instructions which he immediately afterwards (v. 9.) gave them, to
provide

provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses, must have sounded strangely in their ears, and both their joy and their hopes of success must have been considerably allayed, when, instead of telling them of the avidity with which the good tidings they were to publish, would be received by their countrymen, he informed them of the troubles they were to encounter, and the persecutions they were to endure, and that they should even be *hated of all men for his name's sake*. Such a relation could not fail to damp their ardour and fill their minds with the most perplexing thoughts ! In short, in the state in which their minds then were, it was impossible for them to reconcile such treatment with their master's declaration *that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand*. Our Lord therefore, before he proceeded any farther upon so ungrateful a subject, thought it proper to reanimate their minds not only by the assurance *that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand*, but by pointing out a particular period when it should come. v. 23. *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another ; for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man*

Man be come. Now let any one consider well the nature of the commission with which the Apostles were invested—the intimations of the sufferings they were to undergo in the execution of that commission—the state of their minds upon a prospect of this nature being set before them—keeping at the same time their known expectations of the Messiah's kingdom in view; and then let him imagine, if he can, that they could put any other sense upon our Lord's declaration *that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come*—but that the kingdom of the Messiah was then to be set up! This was an encouragement to them to pursue their work, which they much wanted, and to reconcile them to it, he proceeds to inform them, that whatever ill treatment they might be subjected to, it was no more than what he himself expected. *The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord.*

To my view, there cannot be a closer, or a more intimate connection, than is to be found

found between this verse and the preceding and subsequent context—nor can I suppose a more complete satisfaction can be wished for, of the true sense of any writer !

The next passage that we meet with, in the order of the history, relative to our subject, is in the 16th chapter of the same Evangelist, where we find our Lord, upon his entrance into the country that was under the government of Philip, putting this question to his disciples, v. 13. *Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am ?* Their reply was, that *some said he was John the Baptist—some Elias—and others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets.* Our Lord then asked their own opinion of the nature of his character. *But whom say ye that I am ?* To which, the Apostle Peter, in the name of the rest, without hesitation, replied, that he was ο *Χριστος*—the Messiah—or *the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

If we consider the state of things, at the time when this conversation took place, it required no small exercise of faith, to make this noble confession ; for there were then no signs that could lead them to think

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their favourite idea of a worldly kingdom would be realized; and it is worthy of notice, from their account of the sentiments of the people at large, that they were singular in their opinion, upon this head. But they had heard him say *that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was at hand*. They had themselves received a commission to announce these glad tidings, and from an intimate acquaintance with our Lord, they had no doubt of the integrity of his character: and they probably thought (having seen him perform the most astonishing miracles) that he would, in due time, exercise that power in their behalf, and accomplish their expectations.*

We have already seen that our Lord had forewarned them of the sufferings which they were to encounter, in the exercise of their commission to preach the glad tidings of the Messiah's kingdom; and at this early period, he probably thought that they were unable to bear any farther discovery of what

* Of the merit of their conduct in acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, we have the strongest assurance from our Lord's own mouth—*Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven.*

was to befall them. But *now*, greater trials of their faith awaited them; for it was upon this very occasion that our Lord *began*, for the first time, explicitly to *shew to his disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Elders and chief Priests and Scribes; and be killed, and be raised again.*

In the account that has been given of the sufferings which the Apostles were to undergo, we have no intimations given us of any expostulations with our Saviour upon the subject, though they must necessarily have been not a little affected upon the occasion. But no sooner were the sufferings and death of their beloved Master predicted to them, than their astonishment was raised to the highest pitch. These were so utterly incompatible with the character which they had affixed to their Messiah, that they could no longer keep silence. Peter immediately exclaimed—*Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee.* The Evangelists have not failed to mark this astonishment in the most pointed manner. In the next chapter, upon the same subject being again renewed, St. Matthew says *they were ελυπηθησαν σφοδρα*—*filled*
D 2 *with*

with extreme grief at the news. St. Mark's expression is equally remarkable—*ἠγνοουν τὸ ἐνμα*—*they knew not what to make of the matter.* And St. Luke says the same thing, with this addition, that it was *παράκεικλυμενον* *so wrapt up in darkness, that they could not perceive what it meant*—that is, their prejudices concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, hindered them from comprehending it. (See Mark ix. 32. Luke ix. 45.*) The evidence that their prejudices were the real causes of their astonishment, are so manifest, that we could not doubt of it, even if our Saviour had not pointed it out. But his reply to Peter renders it absolutely decisive. *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not, τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ—the things of God—* or spiritual things, but *τὰ τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου—the things of men—* or temporal things.

* Dr. Campbell, the Author of a new translation of the four Evangelists, has, I think, very improperly rendered this last verse. The design of our Saviour, in the preceding verse, evidently is, to impress the doctrine of his future sufferings strongly upon their minds. According to the common translation, it is expressive enough—*Let these sayings sink down into your ears*—let them make a deep impression upon your minds. But by the manner in which the Dr. renders the 45th verse, the reader is necessarily led to suppose, that it was not intended that they should understand it. *It was veiled to them, that they might not apprehend it*; which, as I have already hinted is expressly contradicted by the declared intention of our Lord. See Dr. C. in loco.

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Thus far, I think, there is evidently no difficulty. The astonishment and surprise which the disciples discovered upon our Lord's predicting his own sufferings and death, are very naturally accounted for, by the sentiments which then occupied their minds; and we immediately perceive that, under such circumstances, they could not but be deeply affected with the news, independently of the personal regard which they had for their divine Master. But it was a necessary part of the office which our blessed Lord had undertaken, to correct the erroneous sentiments which his disciples had imbibed, concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. He therefore immediately proceeds, in pursuance of this design, to tell them, how much they had mistaken the matter, if they expected to be loaded with worldly honours, and to enjoy temporal prosperity. Ver. 24. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples—If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* He here tells them, they must renounce their ambitious and aspiring schemes of obtaining great honours and distinction under the conduct of their Messiah—as the things of men, which were totally distinct from the things of God

—and that they must, on the contrary, expect to meet with afflictions and persecutions, if they would continue with fidelity to follow him. For, adds our Lord, in the 25th verse—*Whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake ; i. e. whosoever, at all hazards to himself, will continue faithful to me, shall find it.* But how find it? Why, says St. John, in a passage that is plainly parallel to this—*He shall keep (or rather preserve*) it, unto LIFE ETERNAL.* In the next verse, the extreme folly of preferring interest to duty, is set in the strongest point of view, plainly in allusion to the worldly expectations which then prevailed among them! *For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life, and thereby lose eternal life (for that is evidently the drift of the argument) Or what shall a man give for his life?* Then follows the declaration which our Lord makes, that their fidelity, or infidelity to him, would affect their happiness in a future world, ver. 27. *For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels : and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

* φυλάξει.

Our Lord having thus informed his disciples of the great mistake into which they had fallen, in expecting great temporal enjoyments under their Messiah; having intimated to them, that they must, on the contrary, expect to be exposed to great difficulties and hardships, by a persevering attachment to his cause; and having assured them, that their happiness, in a future state, would depend entirely upon the rectitude of their conduct, and their steady adherence to him; having, I say, delivered these very important and affecting truths, which all will allow to be extremely well calculated to correct their erroneous sentiments concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and to check that ambition which possessed their minds; our Lord appears to me, with the utmost propriety, to finish his discourse with an assurance, that though they had in reality totally misunderstood the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, yet that they were right in their expectation that that kingdom was *at hand*. *Verily, I say unto you—there be some standing here who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* Without an assurance of this nature, it is not easily to be conceived, in the unenlight-

ened state they were then in, that they would have continued to follow our Lord, as their Messiah; besides that it was expedient for him to confirm his original declaration, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, and to point out a time, when it would no longer continue so, but be actually come.

If the view that has now been given of this discourse of our Lord with his disciples be accurate and impartial, as I trust it is, we can, I think, form but one judgment of his true meaning, in the concluding verses of the chapter. The two advents are clearly distinguished from each other—the one by *the coming of the Son of Man in the glory of his Father with his angels*, and by *his rewarding every man according to his works*—the other by *the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom*—and by *his coming before some who were then present should taste of death—or in that generation*.

There is indeed some difference in the language of the parallel passages of the Evangelists, when these two advents are described. In their description of the day of judgment, and of the close connection which the conduct of the disciples would have with their happiness or misery subsequent to that
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awful period, I do not perceive any thing deserving of notice to throw any additional light upon their meaning; but the difference that is observable, in their description of the other advent, is too important to remain unnoticed: for what St. Matthew expresses by *the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom*, St. Mark, with still more force, expresses by *the kingdom of God coming with power*, in opposition, as I apprehend, to the slow advances which it had then made. St. Luke says, only, that they should not ~~taste~~ of death till *they saw the kingdom of God*.

Dr. Seale, in a sermon lately preached before the University of Cambridge upon Mat. xvi. 28. has very properly taken notice of these variations, and has well observed upon them, that St. Mark and St. Luke are the best comment upon St. Matthew; and he says—"from a collation of
 " *all three*, we cannot hesitate to conclude,
 " that a conspicuous display of his celestial
 " power is all that the several phrases im-
 " ply." But these several expressions appear to me to have so pointed a reference to the language which our Lord originally made use of—they agree so exactly with the language of the Prophet Daniel, in describing the coming of the Messiah's kingdom;

dom; and they were so well calculated to support the drooping spirits of the disciples upon the occasion, when our Lord here made use of them, that I am unable to perceive how they can be applied to any other event, than to the coming of that kingdom which Daniel had foretold. And the declaration, which has the joint suffrage of all the Evangelists, that this coming would actually take place before some who were then present should taste of death, is, in my opinion, a strong and incontestible evidence, that this language is not capable of any other application.

I shall only observe farther, upon this part of our subject, that if the verse in St. Matthew, and its parallels in the other Evangelists, describing *the coming of the kingdom of God*, had immediately followed the conversation about the sentiments of the Jews in general, and the disciples in particular, concerning the nature of the Messiah's character, and our Saviour's prediction of his sufferings and death—the propriety of his declaration, that *they should not taste of death till they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*, would have been forcibly felt by every one, and there could have been no dispute upon the subject. But we have proved, it is hoped, to the satisfaction
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of our readers, that the introduction of the argument from verse 23 to verse 28, was well fitted to repress those ambitious views which had taken possession of the minds of the disciples. And if so—the conclusion will be, that the whole discourse contains one connected chain of reasoning, and is perfectly clear and intelligible.

Having now considered the effects which the discovery of our Lord's sufferings and death had upon the minds of his disciples, and taken notice of the method which he took to correct the erroneous sentiments which they had imbibed, while at the same time he reanimated them with an assurance of the coming of his kingdom; our attention will now very properly be directed to the disclosure of another very important, and, to the Jews, most interesting event, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem. This event is frequently mentioned in different parts of the gospel history, either incidentally, or in particular set discourses. But there is no part of the gospel history where this subject is so fully discussed, as in the xxivth of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of the other Evangelists. These chapters, I scarcely need inform my readers, have exercised the ingenuity, and, at the
same

same time, perplexed the minds of the most able Commentators, and the most celebrated Critics. But the clear and unequivocal meaning of these chapters has not yet been discovered, from a want, as I apprehend, of that close attention to the sentiments and opinions which are universally allowed to have influenced the disciples of Christ, in common with the rest of their Countrymen.

As there is an acknowledged difference of opinions prevalent among Divines and Commentators, concerning the meaning of the questions of our Lord's disciples, which were the foundation of his subsequent reply, in the xxivth of St. Matthew, &c.—our first object will be to ascertain that meaning with as much accuracy as possible. And, if we avail ourselves of the ample advantages which a comparison of the different Evangelists affords, and at the same time consider the state and circumstances of things when these questions were put to our Lord, we shall have all the satisfaction upon the subject which can reasonably be desired.

The statement of the evidence of the true meaning of these questions, arising from a comparison of the accounts of the
different

different Evangelists, by Dr. Edwards, is so accurate, and, in my opinion, so unexceptionable, that I shall make no apology for presenting it to my readers.

“ The disciples astonished and concerned
 “ at the denunciation of that severe sentence, which involved even the costly
 “ and magnificent structure of the temple,
 “ came privately unto Jesus, saying, Tell
 “ us when shall these things be, and what
 “ shall be the sign of thy coming and of
 “ the end of the world? (Mat. xxiv. 3.)
 “ In the parallel place of St. Mark xiii. 4.
 “ the question is put thus: Tell us when
 “ shall these things be, and what shall be
 “ the sign when all these things shall be
 “ fulfilled? And in the correspondent
 “ passage of St. Luke xxi, 7. the question
 “ is still differently proposed: But when
 “ shall these things be, and what sign will
 “ there be when these things shall come
 “ to pass? By comparing St. Luke with
 “ St. Matthew, we discover that the two
 “ questions of the latter relate entirely to
 “ one subject; the first to the time, when
 “ the vengeance was to be inflicted; the second
 “ to the signs which were to precede
 “ cede

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 “ questions of the latter relate entirely to
 “ one subject; the first to the time, when
 “ the vengeance was to be inflicted; the second
 “ to the signs which were to precede
 “ cede

“cede its execution. If again we compare St. Luke with St. Mark, we perceive that the distinction, which a late writer would introduce, between *these things* and *all these things*, is utterly without foundation. (See *Theolog. Repository*. vol. vi. p. 188)

These remarks of Dr. Edwards may be confirmed by a further comparison of the phrase—*the end of the world*—from whence has arisen the chief ambiguity of these questions, with some other passages where this phrase is used. 1 Cor. x. 11. *All these things* (the things which the Apostle in the preceding context had been enumerating) *happened to them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom THE ENDS OF THE WORLD are come*, Bp. Pearce's note upon this passage seems to me to be accurate. St. Paul (says he) did not imagine that the *end of the world* was at hand, as some commentators have, much to his prejudice, supposed; he only alluded to the Jewish distinction of time. Another passage of the like import we have in the epistle to the Hebrews, ix. 26. *Now once, IN THE END OF THE WORLD,*
both

both he (Christ) appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself; which phrase, says, the same learned commentator, relates not to the end of the world, but to the preceding age's being ended.

Besides this, we have still further evidence in the 24th of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of St. Mark and St. Luke, where this phrase is first used, to corroborate the limitation of its meaning, to the time when the destruction of the temple was to take place. *Ye shall (says Christ) hear of wars and rumours of wars: See that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass—but the END is not yet.** St. Luke thus expresses it: *The END shall not be ^{εὐθὺς} immediately.†* So again. *This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached ^{ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ} in all the world, for a witness ^{μαρτυρία} ^{ἐσσεὶ} to all the nations, and then shall the END come.‡* To what can the end here mentioned relate? not surely to the end of the world, in the proper and strict sense of that phrase—for besides that the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom seems in-

* Mat. xxiv. 6. † Luke xxii. 9. ‡ Mat. xxiv. 14.

compatible with the immediate approach of such an event, what has the abomination of desolation mentioned in the following verse to do with that event? And to what purpose should the disciples of Jesus be directed upon such an occasion to flee to the mountains and to make such speed as not to enter into the house where they were, to take any thing out of it, or to return from the field to secure even their necessary clothing? The *end* there spoken of, must therefore relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, or to the end of the age preceding that of the Messiah, of which that dreadful catastrophe was to be the signal.

If again we examine the question which the disciples put to their Master—*What shall be the sign of thy coming?* we shall have ample proof of its true meaning, and the most satisfactory evidence that it relates, not to his coming at *the end of the world*—but to the coming of that kingdom which had, in the beginning of our Lord's ministry, been pronounced to be at hand.

We have already seen to what troubles the faithful execution of the office committed

mitted to their charge would, according to their Master's prediction, expose them, and the assurance that our Lord then thought it necessary to give them—that notwithstanding these difficulties, his kingdom, at a given period, would certainly come. We have seen, that on a future occasion he took an opportunity to inform them of his own sufferings and death, and have taken notice of the extreme surprize which this intimation excited in their minds, and that a repetition of the assurances of his coming was absolutely necessary to allay their apprehensions and to keep them steady in their attachment to him. And it must occur to every thinking person that such predictions could not fail to affect the minds of men, who were under the influence of strong prejudices in favour of a temporal kingdom, and that it required no ordinary degree of faith and no slight opinion of the integrity of our Lord's character, to be satisfied with such general assurances.

If the reasoning which has been employed in unravelling the meaning of these passages be allowed to be just, there can,

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I think, be no possible objection to our applying the same reasoning to ascertain the meaning of the question of the disciples in the beginning of the xxivth of Matthew ; for we are so far from having any evidence from the Gospel history, that the Disciples thought the kingdom of the Messiah was come, that even after our Lord's resurrection, we find them putting this question to him. Acts i. 6. *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* As this is a fact which cannot be disputed, it will necessarily follow that the prediction which our Lord, in the beginning of this chapter, utters concerning the destruction which was to befall their country, and particularly the destruction of their magnificent temple, could not but affect the minds of his disciples in a manner equally as strong as upon either of the former occasions ; for nothing could be more inconsistent with their notions than that such an event should happen. They did not indeed (as in the instance of our Lord's predicting his own sufferings) say—*This dreadful event shall not happen to our country ; probably remembering the severe rebuke which they, upon that occasion, met with from our Lord.* But we find

find them immediately directing their attention to the grand object of their expectations, and very significantly expressing their sentiments (their doubts and apprehensions) by the questions which they put to him. *When shall these things be? And what (if these things must be) shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* As if they had said—We are unable to reconcile these events with each other, and are desirous of farther information upon the subject.

It is, I confess, out of my power to conceive any thing more natural than the questions which the disciples put to their Master upon this occasion—or more exactly correspondent to the sentiments and expectations which, at the time, must have occupied their minds. And the evidence that the coming, which they with so much solicitude enquire about, was the coming of the Messiah's kingdom, which they had all along been led to expect, is as complete, at least in my opinion, as any one can well desire. "We may therefore reasonably expect" (to use the words of Dr. Edwards) "that as the
" information solicited is confined to one

" event, the information communicated will
 " be equally restricted. This presumption,"
 he adds, " will be confirmed by a perusal
 " of the chapter we are at present confi-
 " dering; in which, from the third to the
 " twenty-ninth verse, our Saviour replies
 " to the second question, by pointing out
 " the signs which would enable the disciples
 " to prognosticate his coming : he proceeds
 " from the twenty-eighth verse to answer
 " the first question, by defining the limits
 " within which both the desolation and
 " his own glorious advent would certainly
 " happen; and declaring, in the most
 " solemn language, that they should come
 " to pass in that generation : but, as the
 " precise time was known only to the
 " Father, he concludes the chapter, by
 " delivering an exhortation to sobriety
 " and vigilance."*

From this excellent epitome of the xxivth
 chapter of St. Matthew, we might natu-
 rally enough be led to conclude, that Dr.
 Edwards considered the whole of it to re-
 late to the destruction of Jerusalem, ex-
 clusively of the day of judgment. But in

* 2d Sermon, pp. 21—2.

animadverting upon my attempt to prove that the chapter relates entirely to the former event, he says—" Though it can-
 " not be dissembled that this interpretation
 " possesses some advantages over the more
 " common hypothesis, which by violently
 " severing the latter part from the for-
 " mer, renders them applicable to different
 " events, yet the thirtieth verse seems strong-
 " ly to oppose, if not irrefragably to con-
 " fute the opinion which he espouses. This
 " important passage he very slightly runs
 " over, without condescending to illustrate
 " it by a particular explanation."*

The propriety of this censure I shall not controvert, but leave it to the reader to judge of it for himself, by a perusal of what I have advanced upon it in page 26 of my *Illustration of various passages of Scripture*.— I cannot however but lament that the learned Preacher has not thought proper to assign any reasons for thinking that the 30th verse seems strongly to oppose, if not irrefragably to confute my hypothesis!— For my own part I am so far from being able to perceive any tendency in this pas-

* 2d Sermon, p. 24.

sage to confute my opinion upon the subject, that it seems, on the contrary, strongly to corroborate such an exclusive application! Dr. Edwards has himself allowed, in express terms, that the Eyangelist “ proceeds from the 28th verse, to answer the “ first question, by defining the limits, “ within which both the desolation and “ his own glorious advent would certainly “ happen, and declaring in the most solemn language, that they should come “ to pass in that generation.”* Indeed it cannot be denied (whatever may be the hypothesis espoused) that the 30th verse is a direct answer to the question—*What shall be the sign of thy coming?* That this coming related to the completion of our Lord’s original declaration, *that his kingdom was at hand*, will, I presume, after what has been already advanced, admit of no reasonable doubt: That the disciples continued to expect this coming, at the time when the questions in the beginning of the xxivth of Matthew were put to our Lord, is equally clear; and that he in his answers connected this coming with the destruction of Jerusalem, is asserted in such direct

* 2d Sermon, p. 22.

and

and positive terms, that I do not see how it is possible to deny it.

We do not at present enquire into the meaning of the coming of Christ in the 30th verse; but whatever that may be, it must necessarily be applied to the verse immediately following, it being only a description of the effects of that coming upon the elect.

This being granted, the disciples are, in the 32d and 33d verses directed to take notice of the parable of the fig tree. *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see ALL THESE THINGS, know that IT is near, even at the doors.* St. Mark's expression is very little different from that of St. Matthew. Ch. xiii. 29. *So ye, in like manner, when ye shall see THESE THINGS come to pass, know that IT is nigh, even at the doors.* If there is any ambiguity in the use of the pronoun IT—that ambiguity will immediately be removed by comparing these passages with the parallel passage in St. Luke, xxi. 31. *So likewise ye, when ye see THESE THINGS come to pass, know ye that the KINGDOM OF GOD is nigh at hand.*

It must not be concealed, that Dr. Edwards, in a note referring to this very passage of St. Luke, quotes Dr. Sykes as very readily allowing that by the *kingdom of God*, we are here to understand its glorious state and perfection in a future world. And what is very extraordinary, Dr. Edwards adds—"any other interpretation" would be utterly groundless.*

I must confess, that in Dr. Edwards's Sermon upon the subject of the coming of Christ, there are marks of his possessing considerable abilities, as a critic. Besides, his accurate epitome of the xxivth of St. Matthew, which has already been laid before the reader; his rule of criticism, which he has laid down in page 14, is so just, that it will, I am sure, meet with the approbation of every person of judgment: "That whenever the same word is used
" in the same sentence, or in different
" sentences, not distant from each other,
" we ought to interpret it precisely in
" the same sense; unless either that sense
" should involve a palpable contradiction
" of ideas, or the writer expressly informs
" us that he repeats the word in a fresh
" acceptation."†

* 2d Sermon, p. 33.

† Ibid. page 14.

Had the learned University Preacher attended to this excellent rule, in the interpretation of the phrase *the kingdom of God*, in the passage we are considering, it is impossible he could have said, that "any other interpretation than that of Dr. Sykes, would indeed be utterly groundless." Is it a groundless supposition—when the Evangelist says, *when ye see these things*—or, as it is in Matthew, *all these things*, that a reference is made to the things which had, in the preceding part of the chapter, been described? Is it a groundless supposition that in the verses immediately following this passage, the Evangelist includes *the coming of the kingdom of God* in the *παντα* THE ALL that was to be fulfilled in that generation, and that this is declared in the most solemn language? Or, will Dr. Edwards shelter himself under the absurd interpretation of Dr. Sykes, that the word *generation*, must extend beyond the people then living, and mean that the people of the Jews, the generation of Jews shall not cease, till all these things shall happen? A writer in the Theological Repository well observes, that in the usual sense of the word *generation*,

tion, " it contains a plain answer to the
 " question of the disciples ; but if it be
 " interpreted of the Jewish nation, it con-
 " veys no answer at all. " The nation
 " of the Jews shall not perish till all
 " these things are fulfilled.' What answer
 " is this to the enquiry of the disciples,
 " *when shall these things be !*"*

The evidence which we have now laid before the reader, that the coming of Christ means the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, and that our Lord connected that coming with the destruction of Jerusalem, will, we hope, enable us, with some propriety, to enter upon a more particular consideration of the passage which Dr. Edwards thinks strongly opposes, if not irrefragably confutes the limitation of the chapter to the destruction of Jerusalem, exclusively of the day of judgment. This passage is introduced by a previous description, in the language of prophecy, (which to a Jew was perfectly familiar and intelligible) of the destruction of the Jewish state, v. 29. *Immediately after the*

* See the Theol. Reposit. Vol. vi. p. 154. and my Illustrations, p. p. 23-4. in the note there.

tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then (v. 30.) shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth (or rather land) mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. St. Mark, after a similar description of the approaching ruin of the Jewish nation, only says, And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And if we examine St. Luke's description of the calamity predicted, we shall find it is couched in terms that are much less figurative, and the subsequent coming of the Son of Man expressed exactly in the same language as in St. Mark. Luke xxi. 25, 26, 27. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea, and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.

From

From a comparifon of thefe feveral accounts of the Evangelifts, we find that they all agree in describing *the coming of the Son of Man* WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY; and fo far they harmonize with St. Mark's description, ch. ix. 1. that *there were fome ftanding among them, who fhould not tafte of death till they had feen the kingdom of God come* WITH POWER; and with the paffages parallel to it, though thofe other paffages, in St. Matthew and St. Luke, only exprefs *the coming of the kingdom of God*, without particularizing, in the words that St. Mark uſes, the exact manner of his coming, viz. that it would be *with power*. See Mat. xvi. 28. Luke ix. 27. All theſe expreffions plainly allude to the powerful and increaſing influence which the doctrine and religion of Chriſt would have upon the minds of men—of which more hereafter.

Another part of the description of the coming of the Son of Man, common to all the Evangelifts, in the verſe before us, is *his coming* IN CLOUDS, OR IN A CLOUD. The Jewiſh nation expected that the Son of Man (the Meſſiah) would deſcend viſibly from heaven to take upon him the government of their country, and to lead them out to victory
over

over all their enemies. But he informs them that instead of coming agreeably to these expectations, his coming would, with respect to them, be *in clouds*, or *in the clouds of heaven*, i. e. in the visible and manifest execution of divine judgment upon them. They could (as Dr. Gerard has observed) scarcely fail to perceive that coming in the clouds of heaven implied executing judgment; for the expression is used several times in their own scriptures, and always means no more than this.*

I shall only remark farther upon this part of the passage, that though the question is put by the disciples, yet in his answer our Lord does not say *YE*, but in the plural number *THEY shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven*. They were to be the objects of the divine vengeance, while his disciples were encouraged *to lift up their heads, for their redemption was drawing nigh*.

One phrase only now remains to be explained, and that is peculiar to St. Matthew, viz. *They shall see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*. I have in my Illustration

* See Gerard's Dissertations, p. 203.

of various passages of Scripture, page 26, referred this language to the celebrated passage of the Prophet Daniel, ch. vii. 13, 14. *I saw in the night visions, and behold one, like the Son of Man, came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the antient of days; and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations should serve him.* As there can be no doubt that this passage is descriptive of the power and dignity which was, in the fulness of time, to be vested in the Messiah, the strict propriety of the Evangelists applying it to the coming of the Son of Man must be evident at first sight. And until the prophecy of Daniel can be proved to be descriptive of the final judgment of the world, we may safely affirm, that the whole of this 30th verse, is so far from strongly opposing, or irrefragably confuting my hypothesis, that it will remain an incontestible evidence, supported by the whole of the preceding and subsequent context, of its solidity. It was a direct answer to the question of the disciples—*What shall be the SIGN of thy coming?* Why, says our Lord, *then shall appear the SIGN of the Son of Man in heaven:*
the

the very *sign* which the Jews repeatedly, and with great earnestness, called upon Jesus to give, that he was the person he pretended to be.

Very pertinent to this subject are the words of Dr. Gerard in his *Dissertations* already quoted. “ The Jews strained the
 “ *coming in the clouds of heaven* to a literal
 “ sense, to the meaning of a visible appearance, in Daniel’s prediction; and
 “ though they understood it to imply the
 “ execution of judgment, yet it was only
 “ upon their enemies, not upon themselves. But Jesus informed them that
 “ it did not here, any more than in other
 “ passages, denote a visible appearance;
 “ that it meant simply the execution of
 “ judgment, and that the Jews themselves
 “ were the objects of that judgment.”—
 ‘ A sign, says Jesus, has frequently been
 ‘ asked of me; I will now tell you, what
 ‘ sign ought to have been expected: if the
 ‘ Jews had known what it is, they would
 ‘ not have been so solicitous for it; it is
 ‘ very different from what they suppose it
 ‘ to be: the whole Jewish nation shall be
 ‘ utterly dissolved by the severe vengeance
 ‘ of

' of God ; this is *the sign of the Son of Man*
 ' *which shall appear in heaven*, for this is all
 ' that Daniel means by *the Son of Man com-*
 ' *ing in the clouds of heaven*, in the passage
 ' on which they found their expectation of
 ' a sign. On this occasion, then, Jesus not
 ' only assured them that the sign which
 ' they looked for would not be given, but
 ' also pointed out where their mistake lay,
 ' and explained the true meaning of the
 ' prophecy on which they founded it.—
 See Gerard's Dissertations, pp. 203-4.

It must contribute not a little to recom-
 mend the unity of sense for which I have
 contended in the preceding disquisition upon
 the xxivth chapter of St. Matthew, to ob-
 serve the extreme embarrassment which the
 patrons of the opposite hypothesis labour
 under. It has, as we have seen, been the
 foundation of the objection of unbelievers
 to the truth of Christianity—and no won-
 der; for the following exemplification of the
 difficulties which must occur to every man's
 mind upon the scheme of a double refer-
 ence to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to
 the day of judgment, will be abundantly
 sufficient to prove that great doubts and
 perplex-

perplexities, if not infidelity, must necessarily ensue. It is taken from a writer who evidently possesses considerable abilities, and who, it is hoped, will not take offence at my presenting it to the reader, simply for the purpose of shewing in a strong point of view, the difficulties which attend the common hypothesis.

After having made some observations upon the differences which take place between St. Matthew and St. Luke, he proceeds as follows: " From these differences among the Evangelists, it is evident that they spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the end of the world promiscuously; and consequently that they considered these two periods as one and the same. But this will appear in a still stronger light, from one part of our Saviour's discourse in which they all agree."

" Immediately," says Matthew, " after the tribulation of those days, shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.— And he shall send forth his angels with a

F

" great

“ great sound of trumpet, and they shall ga-
 “ ther together his elect from the four winds,
 “ from one end of heaven to the other—ex-
 “ pressions perfectly corresponding to those
 “ used in the next chapter, where there
 “ can be no doubt that it is the day of
 “ judgment which is spoken of—*when the*
 “ *Son of Man shall come in his glory, and*
 “ *all his holy angels with him, then shall he*
 “ *sit upon the throne of his glory, and before*
 “ *him shall be gathered all nations.** But
 “ when we imagine that we have been
 “ hearing of the last grand catastrophe of
 “ nature, it is added, *Verily, I say unto*
 “ *you, this generation shall not pass, till all*
 “ *these things be fulfilled.*”

“ In the same manner, Mark and Luke,
 “ while evidently discoursing of the cala-
 “ mities of the Jews, seem to rise, by a
 “ sudden transition, from the period of the
 “ Jewish state to that of the world itself,
 “ and describe the coming of our Saviour
 “ in terms nearly similar and equally sub-
 “ lime; yet all with one consent refer the
 “ whole to that present generation.”

* Mat. xxv. 31, 32.

“ What

" What then can we infer from such
 " lofty descriptions, consisting of images,
 " so applicable to the general judgment of
 " the world ; which are, notwithstanding,
 " limited to that present generation, and
 " consequently incapable of representing
 " any thing beyond the period of the de-
 " struction of Jerusalem ; but that the
 " writers had associated both ideas together
 " in their own imagination."

" In short, the account of the Evange-
 " lists has all the appearance of an im-
 " perfect copy from a perfect original.
 " And from hearing a discourse, clear,
 " doubtless, in itself, and accurately distin-
 " guishing between the two great events,
 " they have presented us with fragments
 " evidently misplaced, but which as evi-
 " dently refer to each other, whence by a
 " more apt arrangement we can form a
 " perfect whole."*

F 2

It

* See a Volume of Sermons by Pendlebury Houghton, from
 p. 224, to p. 229. It appears to me that it would be an Her-
 culean labour, with all the light and knowledge that Mr. H.
 possesses, to produce a more apt arrangement, and to form
 a perfect whole, upon the plan of a double reference to the

It would be doing the greatest violence to my own judgment to entertain the most distant suspicion that this writer intended to burlesque Christianity by the description which he has here given of the 24th of St. Matthew and its parallels. But however pure his intentions may be, certain it is, that such a description is, in the highest degree, injurious to the character of the evangelical historians, as it represents them as setting at nought all the rules of good writing, and as introducing a confusion and obscurity, which must render all sober criticism useless.

Such, however, is the address of this writer, that he turns this very ambiguity and confusion, and the ignorance of the disciples, into an argument for the truth of Christianity. "What they relate, therefore (*says he*) was not their own invention, because it does not appear to have been perfectly understood

two different events of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the day of judgment; not to say that such liberties taken with the holy Scriptures would lay them open to a corruption and depravation, which would render them, as a revelation, useless!

" by

“ by them. It comes from a superior
 “ source, and bears upon the face of it
 “ the most striking marks of our blessed
 “ Saviour himself, as it is quite in his
 “ own acknowledged manner, to lead the
 “ thoughts of his disciples from temporal
 “ to eternal things.” See pp. 228—9.

When he says, it was quite in our Saviour's acknowledged manner, to lead the thoughts of his disciples from temporal to eternal things, the fact is indisputable: but I presume that he supposes a more apt arrangement *and a perfect whole* to have been formed, and *an imperfect copy* corrected by *a perfect original*—otherwise this will be shifting the blame from the disciples to their Master—and in that case I must deny that it was agreeable to his acknowledged manner. The learned Dr. Jortin, in his excellent Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion,* has collected a great variety of instances of our Lord's leading the thoughts of his disciples from temporal to eternal things,

* See p. 215 to 221, 2d edit. *Laws Considerations*, p. 301. Harwood's Introduction, p. 264 to 273.

which do the highest credit to the character of our Lord as a teacher of religion ; but perspicuity is characteristic of them all.* But in the pretended direction of the thoughts of the disciples from the judgment that was coming upon Jerusalem, to that of the final judgment, there is, on the contrary, a confusion and ambiguity, which, upon the common hypothesis cannot be denied. The truth is, it is inseparable from the scheme ; and some men of the greatest name, as well as the present writer, have ran into great absurdities and contradictions upon this

* The learned Writer here referred to has, I confess, among other instances of this kind, quoted St. Matthew xxiv. 32, and Luke xxi. 29 ; but the reference in both these passages (for they are evidently parallel) is to the coming of his kingdom, which he had announced in the beginning of his ministry. The parable will bear repeating, and will be no bad sample of the perspicuity which graced his allusions in general. *And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees ! When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things (the things he had been describing) come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.* If the allusion had been (as Dr. Sykes and, on his authority, Dr. Edwards suppose) to the kingdom of God in its glorious state and perfection in a future world—where would have been the propriety of the comparison ? Could there have been a greater perversion of the meaning of words ?

sub-

subject. See some striking instances of this in my Illustrations, pp. 28, 9, and the note there.

But it is time to dismiss this part of our subject, and proceed to the last scene of our Saviour's life, when he was arraigned before the High Priest as an impostor who had assumed the great and important character of the Messiah; to which his present degraded situation bore (in the eyes of the Jewish nation) no kind of resemblance.

It appears from the relations of the Evangelists Matthew and Mark, that the rulers of the Jews at first endeavoured by the testimony of false witnesses to prove that he was an impostor. When they had delivered their evidence, the High Priest asked our Lord what he had to say in his defence, Mat. xxvi. 62. *Answerest thou nothing? —What is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus, in the expressive language of the Evangelist, held his peace!* And nothing could prevail upon him to break silence but the solemn adjuration of the High Priest: *I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou*

tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of the living God. To which our Lord, with great and becoming dignity, replied, *thou hast said*; or, as St. Mark has it, *I am*.—He then immediately added, *Moreover I tell you, hereafter*, or as the words *απ' αρτι* or *απο του νυν* (Luke xxii. 69.) ought to have been rendered, *FROM THE PRESENT TIME, ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven.*

If there is any connection between the question of the High Priest and the reply which our Lord made to it; if a person's meaning can be collected from the situation and circumstances of things at the time he spoke; the meaning of our Lord can be no other than this—that though he was now in the hands of his enemies, degraded, contemned and reviled as an impostor and a notorious malefactor, yet the claim which he had made to the character of the Messiah was justly founded! And as a proof that it was so, they should soon see him invested with great power and dignity. *Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Now

Now I ask what other possible meaning could the Jewish Rulers put upon the former part of this reply, than that he should be put in possession of that power, whatever that was, that peculiarly belonged to the Messiah? As to the other part of our Lord's declaration, that they should *see him coming in clouds*—it was morally impossible they should be ignorant of the meaning of the phrase;* and a very severe and cutting declaration it was to them. It was as if he had said—You have been looking and longing for a person under the character of your Messiah, who should raise you to the highest distinction among the nations and render you prosperous beyond the example of all former times. You expect all the sensual gratifications which power or wealth can bestow—but those expectations will assuredly be frustrated. Though I am now the object of your utter contempt, and am, as one of your Prophets foretold, despised and rejected by men, yet you shall soon see conspicuous proofs that my kingdom is approaching—you shall see that as my power

* See this phrase explained in pages 62, 3, and 4, in my Illustrations, page 27.

is advancing, your impending ruin will advance likewise. *You shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

We have now examined, with as much attention as appears to be necessary to enable the reader to form an accurate judgment of the meaning of our Lord, all the principal passages which mention *his coming with power and great glory*, and which at the same time assert that it would be *in that generation*—or while some who were then present with him were still living. And we think we have demonstrated, from the connection and occasion of the discourse, and from the acknowledged sentiments of the disciples of Christ, in particular, and of the Jews in general, as well as from the language itself, that one meaning only can be affixed to them—namely, the coming of that kingdom which, in the beginning of our Lord's ministry, they had been taught to expect was *at hand*. In this investigation, we have not indulged ourselves in any fanciful speculations of our own—nor assumed any doubtful or uncertain principles as the foundation of our reasonings ;

sonings; but such principles only as every man at all acquainted with the history of the times of our Saviour must admit. We have not, in short, had recourse to interpretations of particular passages, at which reason revolts, and sound criticism is ashamed of. We think, on the contrary, that our interpretations, in every instance which has yet fallen under our notice, stand recommended by a great natural simplicity, ease, and propriety; and by what appears to be a distinguished trait in the character of our Saviour—a benevolent condescension to the prejudices and to the weakness of his disciples. This condescension is, in various instances, so striking, that it is almost impossible that it should escape the notice of the attentive reader of the New Testament. It is unnecessary to point out particular cases of this kind beyond what have already been enlarged upon.

We shall now direct our attention to some other passages relative to our subject; which, though not of the first magnitude in point of importance, in the controversy in which we are engaged, must not be wholly

wholly overlooked ; especially as some of them will have a strong tendency to establish the doctrine which we have already advanced.

The first, and most remarkable passage which I shall take notice of is in the xviith of St. Luke, from the 19th verse to the close of the chapter. The whole of this discourse seems to have been occasioned by an enquiry of the Pharisees *when the kingdom of God should come?* The answer of our Saviour is short, but it appears evidently to have been intended to correct the notions which then prevailed, of a magnificent and splendid monarchy to be erected by the Messiah. He answered them and said—*The kingdom of God cometh not with observation ; i. e.* (says Bp. Pearce in his note upon this passage) the kingdom of the Messiah, or Christ, is not to be of that kind as ye expect, and which has outward show and pomp to make it observable. Neither shall they say (when it does come) Lo here, or lo there ! for (they shall say) behold the kingdom of God is within (or among) you. I have here supplied, whether rightly or not, the reader must

must judge, what appears to me to be necessary to the right understanding of our Lord's answer to the question of the Pharisees. It is, however, clear to me, that he plainly asserts the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, in opposition to the expectations which they had formed of his erecting a temporal kingdom. q. d. The kingdom of God, when it comes, will, in a great measure, consist of internal qualifications which its subjects must possess.*

It is the opinion of some learned commentators (which I think probable enough) that when our Lord had replied to the question of the Pharisees, he addressed his disciples, in the hearing of these men, and prophesied of the destruction of the Jewish state. And, it appears to me, that *by the disciples*, in this place, must be meant the great body of our Lord's hearers, as well those

* See the Theol. Repos. p. 269. vol. 6. The writer in this work, whose signature is *Idiota*, observes—that as the question of the Pharisees is in the present tense, (*ἐρχεται*) he renders *εἶναι* future, only in conformity with *ἐρχεται*.

who

who did not believe in him as their Messiah, as those who did. Our Lord thus describes the ardour of the general expectation of his coming, ver. 22. *The days will come when ye (who are looking for a temporal kingdom) shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man; but our Lord tells them—Ye shall not see it.* No such days as you expect shall come. Upon this declaration he founds his caution, in the verse immediately following, ver. 23. *When they shall say to you, See here, or see there; go not after them, nor follow them.* Then follows the reason which our Lord assigns for disregarding any intimations which might be made to them, that their expectations were about to be gratified. *For as the lightning that shineth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in his day.* In the parallel passage in the xxivth of St. Matthew, this latter clause is thus expressed—*So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.* q. d. It will soon be made as clear as the sun at noon day, that you have totally mistaken the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and that you have not the least ground to expect his coming in the sense which

which you have affixed to that event. Our Lord adds, ver. 25. *But first* (i. e. before the nature of his coming shall be fully disclosed) *must be* (the Son of Man) *suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation.*

In the succeeding part of this chapter, the description of the security which would then possess the minds of the Jews is so nearly parallel to that which we have in the xxivth chapter of St. Matthew, that there can be no reasonable doubt that both of them relate the same event, ver. 26. *And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.* St. Matthew says, ver. 37. *But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.* Luke xvii. 27, &c. *They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot—they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus, adds our Lord, shall it be when the Son of Man is revealed.—*

When

When the calamity here described shall be accomplished, it shall fully reveal the fallacy of those expectations of a Messiah, whose victorious arm should give deliverance to the Jewish nation, and raise them to the highest pitch of worldly glory and prosperity ! This would be a decisive proof that they would in vain *desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man*, in their sense of seeing him—or to pay any attention to those who should say—*See here ; or see there !* *

I am very sensible it is asserted by the Writer already mentioned, that *by this revelation of the Son of Man*, we are to under-

* The reader will perhaps not be displeased to be reminded here, of the question of the disciples in the 24th of Matthew—*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age, i. e. of the Mosaic age ?* The answer of our Lord is—the sign of the end of the age is, the destruction of Jerusalem—the sign of my coming—and that the nature of it is mistaken by you is, that it will be *in clouds*--not as a temporal Prince and a Conqueror. So here, by the calamities that were coming on the Jews, the *Son of Man* would be *revealed*—and it would evidently appear that they should not *see one of the days of the Son of Man* to bring them the deliverance they so ardently expected. When Jerusalem was encompassed with armies, it was natural for them eagerly to look for such a deliverance ; and it was probably to this period which our Lord alluded when he said—*The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.*

stand

stand the period of his coming to judge the world. This, he says, " appears from its
 " being introduced in the same manner,
 " and illustrated by the same comparisons
 " that are used by Matthew, when speak-
 " ing of the day which no man knoweth,
 " but which is known to God only." And
 from hence he concludes, " it is evident
 " they spoke of the destruction of Jerusa-
 " lem and the end of the world promiscu-
 " ously ; and consequently, that they con-
 " sidered these two periods as one and the
 " same."*

The tendency of this reasoning to discredit the Evangelical historians is so manifest, that it cannot escape the notice of any one. It will therefore be proper to give it the closest attention of which the subject is capable. And I trust that, besides what has been already advanced, it will not be difficult to prove that his reasoning is utterly destitute of all probability, even upon his own principles. The variations which are observable in the two Evangelists, afford decisive evidence of the

* See P. Houghton's sermons, pp. 224—5.

true state of the case. He says, that the revelation of the Son of Man is introduced in the same manner, and illustrated by the same comparisons that are used by Matthew, when speaking of the day which no man knoweth, but which is known to God only. We readily admit the truth of this assertion, and we think that this harmony of the two historians, when carefully attended to, is a manifest proof that *the destruction of Jerusalem*, not *the day of Judgment* is described, independently of the considerations which we shall now adduce. But this by the by.

Now, upon an examination of these Evangelists, we shall find, that St. Luke's declaration concerning the conspicuous coming of the Son of Man in verse 24, is used in the 27th verse of St. Matthew, where it is indisputable that the destruction of Jerusalem *only* is described. And it is remarkable, that with this passage St. Matthew closely connects the following, verse 28. *Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together*: but in St. Luke, all the comparisons, which so exactly agree with those of Matthew, are first introduced,
and

and the whole is closed with a like declaration, that—*Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together* ; by which it is plainly intimated, to what those intervening comparisons relate.

If again we examine the comparisons themselves, which most evidently, in St. Luke, are intended as illustrations of the suddenness of one and the same event, we shall find that the first set of them, from verse 25 to 30, so far I mean as they correspond, are in St. Matthew arranged the last, from verse 36 to 40.

St. LUKE xvii.

v. 26. *And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.*

27. *They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ; and the flood came, and destroyed them all.*

St. MAT. xxiv.

v. 36. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

37. *But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*

38. *For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and*

28. *Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded.*

29. *But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*

30. *Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark,

39. *And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*

Upon the subject of the 36th verse I have nothing to add to what I have said in my Illustration of various passages of Scripture:* but I must beg leave to repeat it, that when our Lord says—*of that day and hour*—he must mean, *of that day and hour in that generation*, otherwise here is a relative without an antecedent, and of course it would then be impossible to tell what he meant. But I must observe farther, that

See e Illuf. p. 31. " The subsequent verse, which confines
" the knowledge of the day and hour to the Father only,
" does not affect the present enquiry—for the difficulty is
" the same, whether it be referred to one *advent* or the other."
See Dr. Seale's Sermon preached before the University of
Cambridge, Dec. 4, 1791.

when.

when St. Matthew, at the conclusion of verses 37 and 39 says—*So shall also the coming of the Son of man be*—it is in answer to the queries of the disciples in the beginning of the chapter, and it is plainly synonymous with what St. Luke says in verses 26 and 30—*So shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man*—And, *Even thus shall it be, in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

But let us, for argument sake, suppose that this comparison of St. Matthew, by immediately following verse 36, manifestly proves that we are to understand the period of *Christ's coming to judge the world*; yet, if we pursue our examination, the advocates of this hypothesis will be deprived even of this slender support, as will be seen by the following comparisons, common both to St. Luke and St. Matthew.

LUKE xvii.

v. 31. *In that day*
(the day when the Son
of Man is revealed) *he*
who shall be upon the

MAT. xxiv.

v. 17. *Let him who*
is on the house top, not
come down to take any
*thing out of his house.**

G 3

house

* " The Jewish houses were flat roofed, and commonly
" had two flairs, one within and the other without the house,
" by

*house top, and his stuff
in the house, let him not
come down to take it
away: and he that is in
the field, let him likewise
not return back.*

18. *Neither let him
who is in the field, return
back to take his clothes.*

These verses of St. Matthew immediately succeed our Lord's advice, when they saw the abomination of desolation *to flee to the mountains*: they contain a part of that advice, and, of course, they can only be applied to the besieging of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. The language of St. Luke, therefore, must be applied to the same event.

The next comparison of St. Luke, which we likewise find, with some variation, in St. Matthew, is as follows:

“ by which they went up to the roof. Christ's meaning therefore was, that as soon as ever they observed the first signs of the impending ruin about to fall, they were to fly for their lives, without staying a moment to save their substance: he who was on the house top was not to go down into his house, to take away his stuff, but was to go off by the outer passage, as the speediest way of escaping.” See Macknight's Commentary, p. 76, 1st edit. This being the case, the judicious reader will perceive the extreme propriety of our Lord's injunctions, *to watch, as they knew neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man should come.*

LUKE

LUKE xvii.

v. 34. *I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.*

35. *Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

36. *Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

MAT. xxiv.

v. 40. *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

41. *Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

We have been more particular in our examination of these several comparisons, common to both the Evangelists, than perhaps was strictly necessary; but the ample proof that it affords us, from the position of these comparisons in different parts of the xxivth of St. Matthew, of their having a relation to one common event, more than compensate the trouble we have had in the collation; and we may now venture to assert, without pretending to the spirit of prophecy, that the hypothesis of a double meaning, in the xxivth of Matthew, and

the parallel chapters, will not, in future, be embraced by any who are judges of the nature of evidence. Of such advantage is the relation of the same events by different historians ! And we will be bold to say that, in this instance at least, the sacred historians, separately and collectively, have as fair a claim to the character of perspicuous and consistent writers, as the most distinguished, whether in ancient or modern times. If they have been accused of the contrary qualities, we must attribute it to a strong pre-disposition to support a favourite hypothesis, and an unaccountable inattention to the plainest and the clearest declarations of Scripture !

We now beg leave to call the attention of the reader to a passage in the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, which has been honoured with the notice of our learned University Preacher. Our Saviour, says he, closes in the following manner his pathetic lamentation over the city of Jerusalem :—*Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* Mat. xxiii. 39.) But in the next chapter he decisively foretells that
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the generation then existing should not be totally extinguished, till it had witnessed his second and glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven. Yet the records of history do not authorize us to believe that this prediction was accomplished at the destruction of Jerusalem; and it is sufficiently evident that the same signal catastrophe did not influence the Jews to acknowledge the Messiah. And again he asserts, that the question of the disciples concerning their Master's coming was evidently founded upon his preceding declaration.*

It will, I trust, be unnecessary for me to prove (after what has been already said) that our Lord did not, in the xxivth chapter of St. Matthew, foretel that the generation then existing should not be totally extinguished till it had witnessed his *second* and glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven. That chapter appears solely to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the coming of Christ in his Kingdom; the accomplishment of the former of which events would fully demonstrate that they had hitherto mistaken the nature of the

* See Edwards's 2d sermon, pp. 19—23.

latter ;

latter; and it was probably for this reason that he so closely connected the two events together, that he might the more easily correct that mistake!

With respect to the connection which Dr. Edwards asserts to subsist between the latter end of the twenty-third and the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, it appears to me to be an assertion that is not sufficiently warranted to found any argument upon. A writer in the Theological Repository, whom we have already quoted, says, and I think very justly (when speaking of the close of the twenty-third chapter)—We cannot help observing that that discourse ends with the chapter, and that the twenty-fourth chapter records a discourse which began some time after.* He might have added too, that the occasion of the discourse in this last chapter is very clearly stated, and seems to have no connection with what gave rise to the discourse in the preceding chapter.

But whether this be so or not, is of no very great importance accurately to determine.

* See Theol. Reposit. vol. vi. p. 158.

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It will be of much more consequence to endeavour, with precision, to ascertain what our Lord's meaning was, when he said—*Ye shall not see me an' aft^r henceforth, till ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

The very respectable Bishop of Waterford, in his observations on our Lord's conduct as a Divine Instructor, when speaking upon this passage, says,—“ There is “ a difficulty in our Lord's prophecy uttered after his triumphant entry into “ Jerusalem, *Blessed is he that cometh in the “ name of the Lord.* The unbelieving Jews “ are addressed, to whom our Lord did not “ appear after his resurrection.” “ But,” adds he, by way of solving the difficulty— “ the Jews shall acknowledge and worship “ him; either at his future appearance “ when they are restored to their own land, “ or when he sits on his glorious throne to “ judge the world.*”

I am sorry to differ from so able and judicious a writer as Bp. Newcome—but his candour, I am confident, will not suffer him to take offence at my giving it as my

* See Observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine instructor, p. 260.

opinion,

opinion, that this passage does not relate to either of these events—but is addressed *exclusively* to the unbelieving Jews to whom it was originally addressed.

The intelligent reader, on a perusal of the preceding context, will immediately perceive that the woes which our Lord denounces against the Jews, were founded on the ambition, the hypocrisy, and the total want of principle of the Scribes and Pharisees who were then living. If there could have been any doubt of this, it must be removed by our Lord's own declaration in the 36th verse—*Verily, I say unto you, all these woes ταυτα παντα shall come upon this generation.* Our Lord then breaks out into the following pathetic lamentation, dictated by the most exquisite sensibility!—*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* But that time is now past. *Behold your house is left unto you desolate!* The reason is assigned in the verse whose meaning we are examining—*for I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth till*

till ye shall say—blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Of the meaning of this last phrase, little doubt I think can be entertained. It is the same with that which was used by the multitude upon our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. (Ch. xxi. 9.) *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.* The parallel passages a little vary the phrase, and very fully explain the sense which the Jews affixed to it. (Mark xi. 10.) *Blessed be the KINGDOM of our Father David that cometh in the name of the Lord.* (Luke xix. 38.) *Blessed be the KING that cometh in the name of the Lord.* Under the ideas of *a Kingdom—a King—and of him that cometh in the name of the Lord*—they meant the coming of their Messiah to rule over them, and to raise them to the highest pitch of worldly prosperity.

It appears from the questions which the Jewish Sanhedrim put to our Lord upon his examination, that they knew he laid
claim

claim to the character of the Messiah, and they could not but know that his present question to them in the 37th verse, *How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings*, was an oblique intimation that he had a just claim to that title—nor could they fail to perceive, when he told them—*Your house is left unto you desolate*, that he renounced the character of a temporal Prince, and that, in fact, they had mistaken the true design of the Messiah's coming. Our Lord, recollecting that these were the sentiments universally prevalent among them, tells them, at the close of this discourse—*Ye shall not see me henceforth until ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* q. d. What I have now been telling you, is totally incompatible with your expectations; but be assured that I shall never assume the character which you have assigned to your Messiah. —I have done all that could be done, consistently with the great object of my mission, to save you from the calamities which hang over your heads—but you would not hearken to me; I therefore do now take my leave of you—you shall see me no more.

I am

I am at a loss to know how it was possible for a Jew not to feel the force of this declaration of our Lord—or not to perceive its connection with the prediction which immediately preceded it. The connection seems to me to be precisely the same as in the xviith of St. Luke, of which we have already taken particular notice. Our Lord there declares that *they should desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and should not see it*—but that on the contrary, they should see destruction coming upon them.

To those who are convinced, with me, that this is the true meaning of our Lord, in the passage before us, it will appear evident, beyond dispute, that our Lord has not, in this passage at least, foretold, as Dr. Edwards has asserted, “ that the Jews “ should not hereafter behold him, till “ they acknowledged him as their Messiah.” Nor do I think it is in his, or any man’s power to produce a single passage, which, when fairly interpreted, foretels any national acknowledgement of him under that character. The learned Preacher himself, on the contrary, very properly observes, that such “ a conversion “ was not in the least effected by the calamities

“ mities which they suffered from the
 “ Romans ;” * and indeed such a conver-
 sion was incompatible with the destruc-
 tion with which they were threatened.—
 So far was our Lord from predicting any
 such event, that we find him putting this
 question, evidently with a reference to this
 very calamity. Luke xviii. 8. *When the Son
 of Man cometh shall he find faith in the
 land?*

The attentive reader will observe that I
 have not neglected to take notice of the
 most difficult passages which either Dr.
 Edwards has pointed out for particular
 discussion, or which occur in any part of
 the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke,
 which are not of the parabolic kind.—
 These indeed, are so numerous, and at the
 same time so important, that they will re-
 quire an investigation far beyond the limits
 which I have at present prescribed to my-
 self. Should what I here present to the
 reader, arrest his attention sufficiently to
 encourage this more extensive and more
 arduous undertaking, I shall then have an
 opportunity of doing justice to the twen-
 ty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, which be-
 ing confessedly of the parabolic kind, can-

* See pp. 22—3.

not be considered separately to that advantage which will be afforded by a general examination of the language which our Lord used in those parabolic representations.

But although I must, for the present, decline entering upon this extensive and enlarged view of the subject, my readers will probably expect me to pay attention to some passages which the learned University Preacher has pointed out in the Apostolic epistles of the New Testament.

It is obvious to remark, that as our Lord had predicted the end of the Mosaic age, and the introduction of his own kingdom as the Messiah, under the idea of his coming, and connected that coming with the destruction of the Jewish polity, the Apostles, when speaking upon this subject, would, in all probability, speak the same language. Upon an examination of these writings, we find that they actually did adopt this language. Their representations that, *the Lord was at hand*—that *the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh*—that *the day was approaching*—are so numerous, and so often repeated, that there is at least a very strong pre-

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sumption of their having in view the prophecies of our Lord upon these subjects. But it has unfortunately happened, as we have seen, that our Lord's own prophecies of his coming have been erroneously interpreted, of his coming to judge the world *at the last day*; and it was natural to expect that the same erroneous interpretation would be applied to many of these passages in the epistles.

I shall confine what I have to say, to the passages which the learned Preacher has selected, having largely considered the subject in my illustration of various passages of Scripture. The first of these passages is, 1 Thess. v. 4. *But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

“ That St. Paul,” says Dr. Edwards, “ is
 “ here addressing himself to that generation of the Thessalonians, to whom
 “ he directed his epistles, is sufficiently
 “ evident; yet he clearly intimates that
 “ they might live to be spectators of that
 “ awful appearance, of which he had given
 “ such a sublime description in the conclusion of the foregoing chapter.”

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The question that naturally presents itself for our consideration here, is, whether the connection which is here established between the close of the fourth, and the beginning of the fifth chapter, is a just one? To me it appears, after the closest attention which I am able to give this subject, that they relate to very different events—the former to the general resurrection at the last day—the latter to the destruction that was coming on the Jewish nation.

That this is highly probable, may in the first place be collected from the state and circumstances of things in the church at Thessalonica. This is so well represented by the learned Mr. Arch-Deacon Paley, that I shall make no apology for presenting it to my readers in his own words :

No. V.

“ Ch. ii. ver. 14. *For ye, brethren, became*
 “ *followers of the churches of God, which, in*
 “ *Judea, are in Christ Jesus ; for ye also have*
 “ *suffered like things OF YOUR OWN COUN-*
 “ *TRYMEN, even as they have of the Jews.*”

“ To a reader of the Acts of the
 “ Apostles, it might seem, at first sight,
 “ that the persecutions which the preach-
 “ ers and converts of Christianity under-
 “ went, were suffered at the hands of their
 “ old adversaries the Jews. But if we
 “ attend carefully to the accounts there
 “ delivered, we shall observe, that though
 “ the opposition made to the Gospel usu-
 “ ally *originated* from the enmity of the
 “ Jews, yet in almost all places the Jews
 “ went about to accomplish their purpose,
 “ by stirring up the Gentile inhabitants
 “ against their converted countrymen.—
 “ Out of Judea they had not power to
 “ do much mischief in any other way.
 “ This was the case at Thessalonica in
 “ particular. *The Jews which believed not,*
 “ *moved with envy, set all the city in an*
 “ *uproar.* Acts, ch. xvii. ver. 5. It was
 “ the same a short time afterwards at Be-
 “ reia: *When the Jews at Thessalonica had*
 “ *knowledge that the word of God was preached*
 “ *of Paul, at Berea, they came thither also,*
 “ *and stirred up the people.* Acts, ch. xvii.
 “ ver. 13. And before this our Apostle
 “ had met with a like species of persecu-
 “ tion, in his progress through the lesser
 “ Asia :

“ Asia: *In every city the unbelieving Jews*
 “ *stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds*
 “ *evil affected against the brethren.* Acts, ch.
 “ xiv. ver. 2. The epistle therefore repre-
 “ sents the case accurately as the history
 “ states it. It was the Jews always who set
 “ on foot the persecutions against the Apo-
 “ stles and their followers. He speaks truly
 “ therefore of them when he says in this
 “ epistle, *they both killed the Lord Jesus and*
 “ *their own prophets, and have PERSECUTED*
 “ *us—forbidding us to speak unto the Gentiles.*
 “ (ii. 15, 16.) But out of Judea it was
 “ at the hands of the Gentiles, it was of
 “ *their own countrymen*, that the injuries
 “ they underwent were immediately suf-
 “ fained: *Ye have suffered like things of your*
 “ *own countrymen, even as they have of the*
 “ *Jews.*”

The object of the learned Archdeacon
 is to shew the harmony of the Acts of the
 Apostles with the account of the state of
 things in the epistles; which the reader
 will perceive to be sufficiently evident. We
 learn from it too, what we are particularly
 concerned to take notice of, that the perse-
 cutions which the Thessalonians underwent
 originated from the Jews. The Apostle

adds, that *wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost*, plainly alluding to the destruction that was to befall their unhappy country. In such circumstances it was natural for them to be inquisitive as to the time when this awful event was to take place. And we think that the Apostle by the use of the phrase—*the times and the seasons*,* very clearly alludes to that event, and gives them satisfying proofs that it would not be long ere it happened. I do indeed allow that the conclusion of the former chapter relates to the general resurrection of the dead—but it must be observed that this subject is plainly dismissed the Apostles consideration when it is added in the last verse—Wherefore com-

* If the question of our Lord's disciples be allowed (as I think no one will dispute, after what has been said) to relate to the kingdom of the Messiah—*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?* The answer—*It is not for you to know the times and the seasons*—must also relate to the establishment of that kingdom, or to the destruction of Jerusalem, with which our Lord had evidently closely connected it. And if so we have a very strong proof of the meaning of the phrase in the beginning of the 5th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Thessalonians. *Now concerning the times and seasons, ye have no need that I write to you, for the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. Tho' they knew it was to be sudden—they knew neither the day nor the hour—It was not in this respect for them to know the times and the seasons.*

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fort one another with these words. To this, it may, I think, very fairly be added, that there are no collateral evidences that any enquiries were ever made concerning the time of the general judgment ; and that neither reason nor revelation give us any information about it ; not to mention that such an enquiry being a matter of mere curiosity, and of no use whatever to the important purposes of life, would hardly have been indulged with an answer.

But my chief argument against the application of the beginning of the fifth chapter of this epistle, to the day of final judgment, is drawn from the language there adopted. It most certainly strongly resembles, and is the very same in sense with the language which our Lord made use of, when describing the destruction of Jerusalem. That day was to come suddenly and unexpectedly.—*Two were to be at the mill—two in the field—or two in a bed—the one to be taken and the other left.* The Apostle, probably with a view to these expressions, says, *Ye know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night—but that they (the adversaries) should say, Peace and safety, while*

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Sudden destruction was coming upon them. Again, the Evangelists, one and all, give directions to be watchful; and St. Matthew and St. Luke add, the necessity of sobriety; the latter giving this as a particular reason for that sobriety—that as a snare the calamity there described, would come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. In the Thessalonians it is intimated that unbelievers were in darkness, and therefore in danger that that day should come upon them as a thief—but that believers were well apprized of the suddenness of the coming of that day, and were therefore directed to be upon their guard.—Let us not sleep as do others—but let us watch and be sober. Lastly, the Evangelists mention the period of the destruction of Jerusalem, as the time of deliverance to believers—When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. So the Apostle Paul in this chapter, ver. 9.—for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation, by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second epistle, it is allowed on all hands, was written with an express design
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of correcting a mistake that had arisen in the minds of the Thessalonians upon the subject of the coming of Christ. There it is asserted that certain signs were to precede that coming, whatever it was. Dr. Edwards has given it as his opinion, that the word *ἐπισυναγωγή* means the coming of Christ to judgment, and of our being collected in one vast assembly. Mr. Arch Deacon Paley too, having quoted 1 Thess. chap. iv. ver. 16, 17, says—This I suppose to be the *gathering together unto him* intended in the second epistle; and that the author, when he used these words, retained in his thoughts what he had written on the subject before.

Now I cannot help observing, though with all deference to this very respectable and able writer, that the word *ἐπισυναγωγή* in the second chapter of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians is not to be found in the latter end of the fourth chapter of the first epistle, nor any word that has the least resemblance to it, neither indeed has the succeeding chapter: but it may perhaps not be undeserving of notice, that the words *ἐπισυναγαγεῖν* and *ἐπισυναῖαι* are used by St. Matthew

thew and St. Luke too, to express our Lord's earnest wishes to have saved the Jewish nation from impending ruin; and the same words are likewise used to describe the gathering of the elect from the four winds, in the day when the Son of Man should appear in the clouds of heaven. I think, therefore, so far as I am capable of judging of the matter, that there is, at least, as much reason for referring *the gathering together unto him*, to the deliverance which the Christians would experience at the destruction of Jerusalem, as to the day of final judgment. It is not, however, my intention to enter farther upon the consideration of this very intricate and difficult chapter; but, I cannot help observing, that some circumstances strongly possess my mind, which must, for the present at least, bias me against the commonly received doctrine of the Man of Sin, viz.—that the Thessalonians saw the mystery of iniquity already working—that they knew what withheld the revelation of the Man of Sin, and that they had before received a full description of him from the Apostle Paul himself.—From these circumstances, it may naturally enough be inferred, that they had a particular interest in this matter; but if it related

lated to the enormities that were practised in the church of Rome, many hundred years afterwards, it will be difficult to assign the reason of the Apostle's laying such a stress upon the subject, as he evidently appears to have done.

It is needless however to enlarge here, for our University Preacher so far agrees with me upon this head as to say, that "as in the one (epistle) our Apostle insinuates that the day of the Lord might possibly overtake his Thessalonian converts, yet (he) afterwards asserts in the other, without the least hesitation, that that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first." (*ἡ Ἀποστασία* an Apostacy)--it necessarily and unavoidably follows that this Apostacy must have sprung up and arrived at its maturity within the compass of a few years; and that the application of it to the corruptions which have subsisted in the Romish church, must be abandoned as a defenceless and extravagant conjecture." It might be added, that if the latter end of the ivth and the beginning of the vth chapter of the first epistle to the Thessalonians relate

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to the day of judgment—these Christians are not only told of the near approach of this awful event, but they were directed to watch—to look out for it as not far off. It is, I think, besides, a very just observation of Dr. Edwards, “ That if St. Paul had denied that the day of Christ “ was *approaching*, or that it might happen during the existence of the Thessalonians, to whom he wrote, he would “ indeed have directly contradicted what “ he had plainly intimated in his first “ epistle, but he means only to affirm “ that the day was not *at hand*; that it “ would not happen within a week, a “ month, or a year.” But if this was the Apostle’s meaning, (as I have no doubt it was) it will follow that he could not have a reference to that awful appearance “ of which he had given such a sublime “ description in the conclusion of the ivth “ chapter of his first epistle.” For, could St. Paul—could the Thessalonians—could any man who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, entertain the idea that the day of judgment was approaching in this sense of the word *approaching*? Would St. Paul have spoken of his departure as *εφεσθη* at hand?

hand? Would he have foretold the casting away of the Jews, and their long continuance in unbelief, together with their future restoration, when the fulness of the Gentiles should open a way for that important event, if he had thought that the final judgment would come in a few years?

That charity which thinketh no evil would lead one to hope that Dr. Edwards has not adopted this hypothesis the more effectually to fix the imputation of the Apostle's having fixed upon an early period for the accomplishment of an event which has not yet taken place—but whatever was his motive, I will be bold to say, that it is not in his, or any man's power to prove that any such thought ever entered into the mind of this great Apostle. He was too wise a man, and too well instructed in the Gospel revelation, to suppose this of him! For my own part, I have no doubt that the beginning of the fifth chapter of the first epistle to the Thessalonians, is a description of *the times and seasons* when the Jewish dispensation was to be closed, and the kingdom of the Messiah established in its room. That the event

was

was actually *at hand*, and the Theſſalonians, circumſtanced as they were, could not but be expecting the approach of that event. But ſuppoſing that I am not able to prove this, to the entire ſatisfaction of my readers—it will, at leaſt, be as difficult for Dr. Edwards to prove that the day of judgment is here meant, and conſequently the intereſts of Chriſtianity will not be affected by reasonings, that are, at beſt, but precarious and uncertain.

But it is time to follow our learned Univerſity Preacher into the epiſtle to the Hebrews, where he endeavours to ſhew that the following paſſage relates to the day of judgment. ch. x. 25. *Not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is; but exhorting one another; and ſo much the more as ye ſee the day APPROACHING,*

The learned Preacher has employed ſome criticiſm in order to fix a ſenſe upon this paſſage which is ſuited to his own purpoſe—but the judicious reader will not fail to obſerve that he has recourſe to the obſcure paſſage in 2d Theſſ. ii. 1. to prove that

that ἐπισυναγωγή means the coming of Christ to judgment, and of our being collected in one vast assembly. I have however already observed that the verb is twice used by our Saviour himself for gathering the Jewish nation under his protection, and with a view to prevent their destruction,* and I can see no objection to its being so used here.—It will, at least, have this advantage, of rescuing the Apostle from the accusation of an error which one knows not how to account for his being guilty of!

With respect to Dr. Edwards's criticism on the words Ἐγκαταλείπω and καταλείπω. I have no particular objection to the signification of *forgetting* which he has affixed to them. That sense will suit equally well the gathering together unto Christ, in one body, as the members of his visible kingdom, which was to succeed the Mosaic dispensation, as to the convention of mankind before the

* In St. Matthew (ch. xxiii. 37.) the word used is ἐπισυναγαγεῖν. In St. Luke (ch. xiii. 34.) it is ἐπισυναξαί. It is also to be observed, that the same word is used in the xxivth of Matthew, ver. 31. and in Mark xiii. ver. 27.

tribunal of Christ at the last day. But I must observe, that if this last sense, which Dr. Edwards has attempted to establish, were the true one, it might justly " be " asked—with what propriety the first " Christians could be said to *see* that the " day of judgment was approaching, " whereas at the distance of seventeen centuries, no signs of it at all are discoverable by us." The answer of Dr. Edwards, which he challenges any one else to answer otherwise if he can, (though upon his own principles he cannot, I think consider it as a just one,) is that they considered the calamities which were overtaking the Jews as the visible forerunners of that momentous period. Our Saviour himself, adds he, had expressly told his disciples; *So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.* Luke xxi. 31. But I think I have proved, that this passage of our Lord does not relate (as Dr. Edwards would have us, on the authority of Dr. Sykes, to believe) to the glorious state and perfection of the kingdom of God, in a future world;* and there is as little reason to suppose that the Hebrews considered the

* pp. 56—7.

calamities which were overtaking their countrymen, as the visible forerunners of the day of judgment, if by *visible forerunners* is meant the near approach of that awful period; for there is not a single passage, which, when fairly interpreted, gives us any information of the time when it shall happen—much less that it was to happen within a short time. The learned Preacher indeed says, that “the passage before us” aptly corresponds with the following of St. Peter. (1 Pet. iv. 7.) *The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer;*” from whence he concludes that—“*By the end of all things* is undoubtedly to be understood the dissolution of the world, and the appearance of Christ:” adding, that “as in the Hebrews the Christians were commanded to exhort each other to the practice of righteousness, because they saw the day approaching; so in St. Peter they were admonished to be sober and watch unto prayer, because the end of all things was at hand.”

But upon what grounds does Dr. Edwards form this conclusion? Why, says
 I he,

he, " we have sufficiently shewn that the
 " end of the world is in this prophecy
 " interwoven with the demolition of Jeru-
 " salem." From this confident assertion,
 one might imagine, that Dr. Edwards has
 given the most satisfactory evidence of a
 reference to the two advents—but we can-
 not learn this from the excellent epitome
 which he hath given of the xxivth of Mat-
 thew. Nor has he produced a single ar-
 gument to prove that the xxxth verse
 strongly opposes, much less irrefragably
 confutes my opinion of that chapter's re-
 lating entirely to the destruction of Jeru-
 salem. The succeeding chapter, indeed, he
 has observed, is closely united with the
 former by the particle *Then*; and the 14th
 verse firmly connected with the beginning
 by the particle *For*—but Doctor Edwards
 has not even attempted to prove that this
 part of the chapter relates to the day of
 judgment. As to the remaining portion
 of that chapter, Dr. Seale has judiciously
 observed, that there is no connecting par-
 ticle whatever between the 30th and 31st
 verses—but such a particle as is often used
 when a new subject is introduced.

With

With respect to the phrase used by St. Peter—it is worthy of notice that *the end of all things* has a strong affinity to *the end of the age*, in the third verse, and to the declaration in the 14th verse, of the xxivth of Matthew—*And then shall the end come*: to which it may be added, that the advice of St. Peter, founded upon the assertion that that *the end of all things is at hand*, is the very same which our Lord gave to his disciples upon that occasion. In both they are directed to watch and be sober.* The presumption therefore is, that St. Peter, as well as St. Matthew, by the phrase which he uses, meant to describe the near approach of the end of the Mosaic age.

As to the declaration of the writer to the Hebrews, that those Christians *saw the day approaching*, its true meaning will best be gathered from the consideration of the passage in its connection. And I shall beg leave to present it to the reader, nearly in the words in which I have before stated it, in my Illustration of various passages of Scripture, p. 67.

* See Mat. xxiv. 42. Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36.

The exhortation of the Apostle, to be stedfast in the profession of their faith ; to cultivate brotherly love ; to practice good works, and not to forsake the assembling of themselves together ; are urged upon them, by a motive peculiar to the state of things at that time. These were duties, which it was incumbent on them at all times to practice : but the Apostle directs them to excel in them, from the consideration of the events which were then about to take place. *Let all these things be done ; and so much the more, as YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.**

It appears from the subsequent context, and from the nature of the Apostle's argument, in the chapter which we are considering, that those Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote, were grievously persecuted, (most

* The following is the note of Mr. J. Pierce upon this passage : " Our Saviour, Mat. 24, had assured his disciples, that the destruction of Jerusalem should be accomplished before that generation should be dead, which were alive at the time of his speaking ; he had likewise foretold them what should be the signs of the approach of that heavy judgment. And it was easy for every one to perceive, from the number of years that were past at the time when this epistle was written, and from the circumstances in which the Jews then were, and other things mentioned by our Lord, that that destruction could not be far off."

probably

probably by their unbelieving countrymen) and that, upon this account, they were strongly tempted to withdraw themselves from their religious assemblies, which, in their situation, would be a declaration that they were ashamed of their profession. And such was the light in which the Apostle evidently viewed this conduct, ver. 26. *If we sin wilfully, that is, if we deliberately and wilfully apostatize, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth; after we have been convinced of the truth and excellence of Christianity; there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*—no other sacrifice sufficient to atone for our sins is left us, *but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*—that is, those who oppose or apostatize from Christianity.

That this *sinning wilfully*, or withdrawing from the Christian assemblies, was a desertion, or apostacy from Christianity, *that better covenant*, which was established upon *better promises*, is plain, from the instance which the Apostle adduces in the verses immediately following, ver. 28, 29, 30. *He that despised Moses's law, died without*
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mercy;

mercy, under the hand of two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, or more properly, common blood, and has done despite unto the spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said—Vengeance belongeth to me; I will recompence saith the Lord. And again—The Lord shall judge his people. And to impress, with still greater force, this argument upon their minds, he adds, ver 31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The judicious reader cannot fail to observe, that the punishments which were inflicted upon the despisers of Moses's law were all of a temporal kind; and as these were set before them, as examples from which they might take warning, it may reasonably be inferred that he alludes to temporal punishments to be inflicted on those who deserted from the Christian faith; especially if it be considered that the quotations from the Old Testament, are likewise descriptive of temporal judgments.

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In the 25th verse, we have taken notice that the Apostle directed the Hebrews *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*, from the consideration that *the day*, the time of their deliverance *was approaching*. In these last verses he dissuades them from it, by setting before them the great danger of Apostacy. q. d. You are now in a state of persecution from your countrymen, which, in a little time, if you are patient, will be removed! You may, indeed, by apostacy, escape it; but by so doing, you will expose yourselves to still greater calamities, which are ready to overtake the unbelieving Jews.

In the 32d verse, this argument is seconded by another, drawn from their former manly behaviour under sufferings, it should seem from the terms used in the Greek, still more dreadful than those to which they were now exposed. *But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, after ye had embraced Christianity, ye endured, πολλῶν ἀθλήσεων παθημάτων* a great conflict of afflictions; partly while ye were made a gazing stock, θεατριζομενοι, exposed as upon a public theatre, both by reproaches

and afflictions, and partly, while ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye had compassion of me, in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance. Such being their noble and truly praise worthy conduct in times of past difficulty and trouble, the Apostle continues his argument, and urges them to continued perseverance, ver. 35. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath, even now, in this present life, great recompence of reward; for ye have still need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise, the promise of deliverance: for, yet a little while and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.*

* It is to be observed, that in the persecution to which the Apostle here alludes, the prospect of a reward in heaven animated the Christians under their sufferings, and certainly a firm belief of a future state of rewards, was sufficient to support them in the most trying circumstances. This prospect was still before them, and ought to have its influence; but it was an additional motive to fidelity, of which the Apostle could not but avail himself, that the time was at hand, when they should be delivered from their present troubles; and a very powerful one it was, for, it is a truth that no one will dispute, that human nature is most affected by prospects, whether of good or evil, that are nearest at hand.

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It is I think difficult to conceive that the Apostle is here speaking of any other coming than that which our Lord had foretold would happen in that generation. The language, we may observe, is extremely similar to his. *The day approaching*, in the 25th verse; the chain of reasoning preceding and subsequent to it; the situation and circumstances these Hebrew Christians were in; the design of the whole epistle, which manifestly was, to shew the great superiority of the Christian, to the Mosaic dispensation; and the time when it was written—all conspire to confirm me in the opinion that the Apostle had the destruction of Jerusalem in view, in the chapter before us. The manner too, in which the Apostle concludes the argument, is perfectly consonant to this interpretation. ver. 38. *Now the just, by faith shall live*, that is, shall preserve his life; *but if any man draws back*, or forsakes the profession of Christianity, by withdrawing from the public assemblies, *my soul shall have no pleasure in him*: he shall not receive the promised deliverance and protection, which belongs only to those who continue faithful. In the last verse, the Apostle expresses

presses his confidence, that the arguments which he had laid before them, would have their due weight and influence upon their minds; that they would not apostatize *εις απολειαν* to their destruction, but act becoming their character and profession, and thereby have a title *εις περιποιησιν* to redemption or deliverance. *We are not of those who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul.*

It may be observed farther, that if the declaration of the Apostle, that the Hebrews *saw the day approaching*, and that it was but A LITTLE WHILE *and he that should come, would come and would not tarry*, related to the day of final judgment, he said what was not true. It was not a *little while*, but would be *many ages* before that event would take place; nor could he, with any propriety, say, that *they saw it approaching*. If, on the other hand, under these ideas of contiguity, he spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, his language was that of perfect accuracy and precision; for it is the opinion of the most able judges, that this epistle was written in the year 63, and the Jewish war

war broke out in the year 66, so that it was indeed but *a little while*, and he that *should come would come and would not tarry*.

To conclude--If the gradation of language used by the Apostle Paul, and by the other Apostles, in this and other epistles upon this subject, is compared, it will, perhaps, afford strong corroborating evidence that the meaning which we have been endeavouring to establish, is the true one. In the First of the two epistles to the Thessalonians, which were written in the year 52, the attention of believers is directed to *the times and seasons*, and they are, at the same time, told *they knew perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*, and on that account they were exhorted *to watch*. In the second epistle, the Apostle asserts that *Christ should not come unless there came an apostacy first*; i. e. until certain signs had intervened, which had not yet made their appearance. The epistles to the Romans and to the Philippians were written, the former six, and the latter ten years later, and in both of them St. Paul declares that *the Lord was at hand*. In that of St. James, which is supposed to have been written

written in the same year with the epistle to the Phillippians, that Apostle says, *the coming of the Lord draweth nigh*. In the epistle to the Hebrews, which is the subject of our present attention, and which was written in the spring of the year 63, the Apostles language, as we have observed is—*the day is approaching*—and, *Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry*. But it is remarkable that St. John's first epistle seems to intimate that it was still nearer: *Little children, this is THE LAST HOUR*; and it is particularly worthy of our notice, that he gives this reason for its being *the last hour*—*There are many Antichrists*; i. e. many who assume the character of the Messiah, in opposition to Jesus the true Messiah, *whereby*, says he, *we know that it is THE LAST HOUR*. The attentive reader will immediately recollect the words of our Lord when describing the signs of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. *MANY shall come in my name, saying, I AM CHRIST—and they shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not—for there shall arise FALSE CHRISTs, &c.**

* See Mat. xxiv. 5, 24. Mark xiii. 6, 21, 22. Luke xxi. 8.

I am very sensible that the opinions of the learned are much divided about the time when this epistle was written, and that Dr. Lardner, whose dates I have followed, with respect to the other epistles, has fixed the date of this epistle nine or ten years after the destruction of Jerusalem. But I beg leave to submit it to consideration whether it is at all probable that any pretenders to the Messiahship would arise so soon after that severe and fatal blow was struck? Or, if there were any, how could they infer from thence that it was *the last hour*? Besides, if this epistle was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, to some persons it may seem strange that there is not the slightest hint given of the accomplishment of our Lord's prediction; but upon this circumstance I mean not to lay any very great stress; for it may be said, and with great truth, that the fact was too notorious to require particular notice. I cannot however but think that the other circumstances of our Lord's prediction *that Antichrists would arise*, and that St. John's saying *many such* were then actually risen, are very strong proofs that this epistle was written some short

short time before the destruction of Jerusalem.* And if so I infer, that these gradations of language so strikingly observable in the epistles of the New Testament, are highly worthy of attention, and very decisive evidences that the Apostles had no thoughts of describing the final judgment of the world as near approaching. They probably meant, by these expressions, (which from the general manner in which they are made use of, must have been perfectly well understood by every Christian of those times) delicately to hint the speedy accomplishment of our Lord's prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and at the same time to intimate a farther extension of the Messiah's kingdom, agreeably to the declaration of

* After I had written this, it gave me pleasure to find Bp. Newcome of the same opinion. I am inclined, says he, to place the writing of St. John's first epistle a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem. And he quotes Grotius's note on ch. ii. 18. as well worth considering. *Ultima hora*, i. e. ultimum tempus, ubi ad Judæos sermo est, significat tempus proximum excidio urbis ac templi et reipublicæ Judeorum. And the words, *whereby we know that it is the last time*, have much force, if we suppose that they refer to our Lord's prophecies. See Bp. Newcome's Observations, &c. p. 192, and the note. It seems wonderful how any other interpretation, with these prophecies in view, could have been adopted!

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our Saviour—that *the kingdom of God should be taken from the Jews, and given ^{ever} to a nation*—or to the Gentiles, *who should bring forth the fruits thereof.*

In this view of the subject, the attentive reader cannot fail to observe a perfect harmony and consistency in the language of our Saviour and his Apostles. Our Lord, in the beginning of his ministry, declared, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Upon the credit of this declaration, which exactly coincided with the general expectation of the Jews, his disciples attached themselves to him from a supposition that he might be their Messiah. When by an intimate acquaintance with him, and by the mighty works which they saw him perform, they were convinced that his claim to that character was justly founded, and that he was in reality the very person of whom Moses and the Prophets had wrote—it was natural for them, impatiently, to expect that he would assume the dignity which they had affixed to that important office. But, instead of this, they were told of the difficulties which they had to encounter—of the sufferings
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and death which he himself was to undergo, and of the terrible destruction which was to befall their unhappy country. Their astonishment, on the prediction of events like these, was excessive, and they were utterly unable to reconcile them with their preconceived notions of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. To support their drooping spirits upon these trying occasions, our Lord thought it necessary to repeat his original assurances *of the coming of his kingdom*, and to point out a given period within which that kingdom would be erected. These assurances were held out to them upon all these occasions, intermixed with some seasonable hints to check the ardour of their ambition, and to correct their false notions of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and they were continued till the close of our Saviour's ministry. And no where were these assurances more expressly, or more fully made, than when, in compliance with their request, he particularly enlarged upon the signs of his coming, and plainly told them they would have ample satisfaction that his original declaration would be fulfilled, when the destruction which
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he had foretold was coming upon them, was accomplished. When their Lord and Master was afterwards received up into heaven, and this important event began to approach, the apostles adopt expressions which plainly signify their firm belief that his predictions were just about to have their completion. *The kingdom of heaven is at hand. There are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God. When ye see these things come to pass, ye know—or rather ye will know, that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.* So said our Saviour. His Apostles say, *The Lord is at hand—the day is approaching. Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. This is the last hour—and there are many Antichrists, whereby ye know that it is the last hour.*

One could hardly, a priori, have imagined, that these passages of the Apostles could have been misunderstood by those who were in possession of the early history of our Lord's life, and were acquainted with his language, and with the strong prejudices, concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, which visibly actuated the whole conduct of his disciples, even till

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after his resurrection. But that they have been mistaken is evident, not merely from the resemblance of the language, but from an actual investigation of our Lord's language in its connection, which is the only satisfactory method of ascertaining the meaning of any writer; and from his express declaration, that the kingdom of heaven would continue to be *at hand* till the disciples saw the things come to pass which were connected with the destruction of Jerusalem.

The meaning of the Apostles, when they use this language, may not perhaps (from the nature of epistolary writings) in every instance, be so clearly traced by the connection—but that they did, when they wrote their epistles, expect the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, upon the dissolution of the Mosaic dispensation—it is absolutely impossible, without flying in the face of the most positive evidence, to deny. In the epistle to the Hebrews, which (as we have already observed) was written about the year 58—the author asserts of Christ, that he hath *obtained a more excellent ministry* (than Moses) *by how much he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon*
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better promises; for if that covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with the first, he saith to them, i. e. to the Jews, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: upon which the Apostle thus remarks, ver. 13. In that he saith, a New Covenant, he has made the first Old, or of no value. Now that which decayeth and waxed old, is ready to vanish away.

The same kind of reasoning is used, ch. xii. 25. Having said, ver. 24. that they were come to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel—the author founds this argument upon it. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh, i. e. Jesus; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spoke by his messenger Moses, on earth—much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word once more signifieth the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those

things which cannot be shaken, may remain: Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom, (the kingdom of the Messiah) which cannot be moved, which, agreeable to the prediction of the Prophet Daniel, was to be an everlasting kingdom —let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, and with godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.

The judicious reader will observe that the Apostle plainly distinguishes the *New Covenant* from the *Old one*, which he asserts was *ready to vanish away*. The like declaration he makes in the first chapter, where the argument of the superiority of Christ to Moses is similar to that in the passages which we have recited. That the destruction of Jerusalem was completed soon after the writing of the epistles the records of history give us the most ample assurances —that the accomplishment of that awful event was the opening a great and effectual door to the establishment of Christ's kingdom among the Gentiles none, I presume, will dispute; and that our Lord's original prediction, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, was then accomplished in its literal meaning, must be admitted by every impartial

impartial person. The coming of this kingdom is very properly termed—*his coming*—*his coming in his kingdom*—and by other phrases of the like import. In short, the whole of the doctrine of the coming of Christ, may, in a few words, be considered as a prediction of the establishment of the Gospel dispensation; and the Gospel history, as a plain narration of the completion of that prediction, and of the means by which it was brought about.

If this is a just view of the subject, we may then see not only the futility of the objections of unbelievers, but the truth of Christianity fully confirmed. This doctrine, ill understood, has been long thought to bear hard upon its credit; but we are very much deceived, if the light in which it has now been considered, will not add a lustre to our religion, which must have great weight with the thinking part of mankind. We cannot but perceive that it harmonizes most exactly with the known sentiments and expectations of the Jewish nation at the time of our Lord's appearance. We see the natural workings of the human mind in the conduct of the Apostles,

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all the time of their Master's life, and while they remained under the influence of those prejudices which they had imbibed concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom ; and we trace, in that conduct, all the marks of an authentic and genuine history. Every thing in their behaviour is natural and in character ; and we almost feel that the discoveries which our Lord at different times made to them, would have influenced us exactly in the same manner, as it did them, had we been in their situation, and lived in those times !

A P P E N D I X.

IT was originally intended to confine our thoughts solely to the consideration of the preceding subject ; which, at a sceptical æra like the present, it is hoped may prove a seasonable antidote against the attacks of Infidelity. But our learned University Preacher has advanced an objection against the Miracles of the Gospel, with such an air of triumph, as will, we trust, justify the hazarding a few observations upon it. Having said that “ the learned Jortin, in the first of his discourses concerning the truth of the Christian religion, has enumerated the several causes, which, in his opinion concurred to hinder the Jews from embracing the Gospel,”

“pel,” he adds—“It will be sufficient to observe in general that though each of the prejudices, which he has specified might have inspired the Jews with an aversion to Christ, had he been nothing more than an unassisted teacher of righteousness, yet their *united* force would have been irresistibly borne down by the natural influence of an undoubted miracle.”*

This argument he has not hesitated to insinuate is unanswerable! And indeed, if it can be proved that the natural influence of an undoubted miracle is irresistible, it must be acknowledged that it is not possible to contrive a more complete refutation of Christianity than is contained within its own records. Every page would then contain a complete demonstration of its falsehood! One thing, however, will occur to every man's mind, that the authors of the Gospel History had no conception that the natural influence of a miracle was irresistible; and it is equally certain, that the great multitudes who at first embraced Christianity, were not in possession of Dr. Edwards's infallible recipe for the discovery of an imposture—for if they were, Christianity must have been stifled in its birth, and the Advocates of Infidelity would have been spared the infinite pains which have been taken to impair its credit!

But what proofs, it may be asked, does Dr. Edwards furnish us with, of the natural irresistibility of an undoubted miracle? He is so far from giving any evidences of the natural influence of a miracle, that some doubts plainly hang about even him, of the solidity of his own hypothesis, though he speaks of it with such an air of confidence. Till it can be ascertained, says he, with some degree of precision, what effect a real and sensible

* See Dr. Edwards's 1st ser. p. 10.

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miracle, wrought in confirmation of a future retribution, would produce in the mind of a Pagan, it will be impossible to estimate how far this influence might be counteracted by temporal allurements, if indeed it would be counteracted at all.

To me it appears, that till the learned Preacher had ascertained with some degree of precision what effect a natural and sensible miracle would produce, he ought not to have asserted that it was irresistible, much less have levelled such an argument against Christianity, as a proof of its falsehood! But the fact is, we can have no knowledge of the natural influence of a miracle, but from experience, which is our only guide in judging of the natural influence of other things, as well as of miracles. If indeed Dr. Edwards can prove that all things operate upon the human mind, in exact proportion to their evidence, and to their natural influence, and that no other causes can intervene to counteract that evidence, or destroy that influence, I will then allow the natural influence of an undoubted miracle to be irresistible, and consequently that Christianity is a *devised fable*—but the farthest in the world from being a *cunning one*. But are there no instances of the phenomena of the natural world failing to produce the effects which they are naturally calculated to produce upon the mind? Have we no examples of the operation of other causes to counteract their natural influence? Is the learned University Preacher so inattentive to what passes in the world, as not to perceive that vice hardens the heart—that sacrifices are sometimes made of truth to interest—of virtue to ambition? and that human beings in particular circumstances, act against the clear dictates of their own minds? A miracle, it is true, on account
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of its uncommonness, is a more striking phenomenon than any events, however great, which can be accounted for from natural causes, and therefore better calculated to rouse attention, to impress the mind, and to influence the conduct of the spectator—but it does not appear to me to have the power of rooting out bad habits, and of destroying the prominent features of ambition and the love of the world, so notoriously prevalent among those before whom our Saviour's miracles were wrought. Not even our Lord's own disciples could be cured of their prejudices concerning the worldly kingdom of the Messiah, till facts, stubborn facts, which directly opposed the very supposition of a temporal kingdom, convinced them they were ill founded.

There is, however, I acknowledge, one sense in which a miracle is irresistible. If a miracle is fairly and openly wrought—it is absolutely impossible for the spectator not to believe the existence of that miracle. If a man restores a limb to another, in my presence, which was wanting—it is not in my power, if I make use of my eyes, to withhold my belief of that miracle. Conviction of its reality must follow. Where doubt exists, it must, in my estimation, proportionably affect the credibility of that miracle. But does it necessarily follow that a conviction of the reality of the miracle must influence my conduct, or that it will destroy the natural influence of other principles upon my mind?

To apply this reasoning to the miracles of the Gospel—the evidence of their reality appears to have been so complete, that not a man in Judea, who saw them performed, or who had an opportunity of examining into

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their truth, ever questioned their authenticity. If a single instance could be produced from the Evangelical History of a person disbelieving the truth of any one miracle which was wrought by our Lord—it would doubtless bring discredit upon the authenticity of that miracle, and so far injure the credit of the performer. This I confess would, in my opinion, do more towards invalidating their claim to our belief, than all the objections of unbelievers put together. But happily for the cause of Christianity, no such instance is to be found in the whole of its records—nor any thing like a doubt, that the miracles of Jesus were really performed. This is an evidence, though, properly speaking, only of the negative kind, which is of no small consequence to authenticate the miracles of the Gospel—but how greatly is it enhanced by the numerous positive acknowledgments of their reality, both among the common people and their rulers? Many of the miracles of Christ were of such a nature as to be authenticated or confuted long after they were wrought. In the case of the man that was born blind, infinite pains seem to have been taken to sift the matter to the bottom, and the rulers of the Jews were manifestly extremely desirous of bringing discredit upon the cure—but the more they investigated the matter, the brighter and the more conspicuous were the evidences of its reality. They could not deny the truth—but they dismissed the man with this poor subterfuge, that Christ was a sinner, because he had wrought miracles on the sabbath day. The resurrection of Lazarus likewise was equally capable of the strictest scrutiny, and the bright conviction of its truth, led the Jews to consult how they might put him to death. The resurrection of our Lord himself was fully confirmed by the silly invention, that the

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the disciples had stolen his dead body while the guards were asleep. This grand event had been predicted by himself, and limited to the short space of three days. —The Jewish rulers were in possession of his dead body, which was deposited in a new tomb, hewn out of the solid rock. They were aware of his prediction; and to prevent the possibility of a fraud—a guard was set—a stone was rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre, and the guards were regularly changed, according to military custom. In short, every precaution was taken which human sagacity could devise, to prevent a fictitious resurrection---but behold a power greater than that of the guard, burst the bars of the grave, removed the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and re-animated the lifeless body of the crucified Jesus. His resurrection was openly attested by his Apostles within a few days afterwards, in the very city where he suffered death; and the Jews had no other means of evading the truth of their assertion, than by declaring that the guard were asleep while the body was stolen away; which, in such circumstances, was equivalent to the acknowledgment of a real resurrection.

As to the authenticity of the records of these miracles, the appeal must be to the common method, by which the truth of any remote facts are to be ascertained. It is well observed by a writer of high repute upon the subject,* that as the relation of the Christian miracles is only an historical fact, it can only be expected that it should have just such a proportion of probability as other historical facts have. And this, says he, is indeed the case; all the reason we have for believing the truth of any part of ancient history, of the Carthaginian, for instance, or Peloponnesian wars, the

* Mr. WESTON, pp. 21—2.

the same we have for the belief of the performance of miracles; for do we believe the one upon the credit of impartial historians of those wars, as Thucydides and Livy?---so must we do the other on the credit of impartial historians of those affairs, as St. Matthew and St. John. Were Thucydides and Livy such honest men, that they allow no suspicion of their joining in falshood, and a design to impose on succeeding ages? Much more so were the Saints and Apostles. Were Thucydides and Livy again so well acquainted with the matter of fact, that as they had no mind to deceive others, so they could not be imposed on themselves? Certainly so were the Saints and Apostles, as being eye witnesses to the transactions.

If the records of the Gospel will bear to be scrutinized with severity on the subject of their authenticity; if there are such marks of truth in these records, considered merely as an history, as are to be found in any other history whatsoever; it is extremely unphilosophical to suffer reasonings to which no experience has ever given countenance to overturn the truth of well attested facts. Dr. Edwards may blush for the answer of the Remonstrant's Professor, when he appeals to the Gospel Miracles as well attested facts: but if they are facts, why not give them the credit which is due to them, and which we hesitate not to give to other facts? If they are not facts, let this be fairly proved, and we desire no credit to be given them. As we do not call upon men to believe without evidence, we see no reason for an incredulity which has no evidence to support it.

FINIS.



